

NEWSLETTER FOR BIRDPWATCHERS

Vol. 11 No.1

January '71

N o t i c e

The Tenth Annual General Meeting of the Bird-watchers' Field Club of India scheduled to be held on Saturday, the 16th January 1971, is postponed to 23rd January 1971. See p. 13 inside.

NEWSLETTER FOR
BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 11, Number 1

January 1971

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Taped impressions, by A. Navarro, S.J. | 1 |
| Kaziranga for Birds, by F. M. Gauntlett | 4 |
| Birds in urban environments, by Lavkumar J. Kacher | 8 |
| Survey of Pesticides position in India, by Datta Manchekar | 9 |
| Brevity in bird names, by D. A. Stairmand | 11 |
| Notes and Comments | 13 |
| Correspondence | 14 |
| Winter visitors at Bandra Creek, from Vipin Parikh & Vijay Bhatt | |
| Crows as destroyers of mosquitoes, from Kameshwar Pd. Singh | |
| A tree that attracts birds: <u>Muntingia calabura</u> , from Ananta Mitra | |

TAPED IMPRESSIONS

A. Navarro, S.J.

For two consecutive years I have been spending the May vacations going up and down through the ravines and plateaux of the Khandala region with the sole object of fulfilling my long desired ambition to record the songs and sounds of the birds of this region.

In pursuit of my ideal I simultaneously collected a series of facts and observations that may be of some interest to all but mainly to birdwatchers.

Since last year's recordings were not up to my expectations possibly on account of lack of experience, in 1970 with the hope of better luck and with the experience of last year, from the beginning of my holidays I started my rounds, going throughout the very same spots where the recordings were made the previous year with this idea in view that I would find the same birds more or less under the same circumstances; in fact it happened as expected but to my great surprise, not with the same results.

What called my attention from the beginning was the absence of the cheerful and noisy atmosphere proper to the breeding season, i.e. the lack of the songs of singing birds and the calls and sounds of the non-singing birds. To all appearances, everything seemed to be normal, most birds with the exception of the thrushes and a few others

were busily going through the proceedings of their breeding activities.

It is evident that the irregular behaviour observed in most of the singing birds during their breeding season aroused some interest. It could be that some of the components for a well-balanced ecology had partially failed. The birds that were really prominent were the Whitethroated Ground Thrush, the Blackbird, the Magpie Robin, the Spotted Babbler, the Tailor Bird and the Iora. Their songs could be heard throughout the day from all directions of the forest, by the middle of the wonderful month of May. The Whitethroated Ground Thrush and the Magpie Robin were feverishly engaged with their songs the whole day long. If the birds were left undisturbed, their songs would last from 15 to 25 minutes at a full stretch; when disturbed they used to flee to a nearby perch and start once more. As for the Magpie Robins, they would always return to the singing post, a typical feature of this bird; it was also the first bird to start its daily concert, as early as half past four in the morning and finish around half after seven in the evening. The Blackbird did not enter into its singing mood until towards the end of the month of May.

Most of the singing birds will sing or call the whole year round, but out of the breeding season their songs will be plain and simple. In the case of the Whitethroated Ground Thrush, the songs would drop completely by the end of June, but the Magpie Robin, the Iora, the Tailor Bird and the Spotted Babbler would continue uttering their rather monotonous musical calls.

The singing season is the breeding season since the singing is an integral part of the bird's breeding cycle; the purposes of the songs are three-fold: the selection of the partner, the defence of the territorial breeding grounds, and the maintenance of union during the breeding season. E. Armstrong in his book The Study of Bird Song, in Chapter 9 - Song and the Animal Cycle, says that some naturalists have given to the territorial song such prominence as to conclude there is no other kind of song.

With the exception of a few sparing calls heard at random throughout the forest, some of the noisiest birds noted for their loud and persistent calls, as for example the Hornbills and the Tree-pies, kept mysterious silence, most of the time. The same pattern of behaviour could be noted among the noisy Bluewinged Parakeet; the Seven Sisters kept mum until the end of May when suddenly the sisterhood chorus of discordant calls and squeaking sounds gave the appearance of an awakening from a long mourning period. The Green Barbet and the Coppersmith appeared to cut short their loud and persistent calls. The cheerful songs of the larks and the pipits were so brief and feeble

as to give the impression that they had forgotten their songs. The Shama never went further than the melodious short songs uttered out of their breeding season. The pigeons and the doves seemed to keep to themselves in voluntary confinement or seemed to have absconded to some far away forest for only a few sporadic calls could be heard throughout the season. The Indian Robin and the bulbuls appeared far below their high standards.

The fact that some birds have shortened their songs or lowered their standards or dropped them altogether at this time of the year is clear evidence, as earlier stated, that some factor must have been responsible for this behaviour. Many are of the opinion that the influence of light and weather conditions are responsible for the changed behaviour among the birds.

In order to confirm this theory I am going to give a detailed account of the observations on a colony of House Sparrows at the entrance of the compound of the Court of Small Causes on Lokmanya Tilak Marg, Bombay. There is a Jak tree, whereon hundreds of house-sparrows come every day to roost; it may be that the healthy condition of the tree with its heavy foliage offers the sparrows a safe and comfortable place; the tree is so situated that it is well protected from stormy weather. Every evening and morning the sparrow chorus is heard and well observed by the neighbours of the court building. There is a systematic control by the light factor. During summer, around 6.30 in the evening the sparrows come in small groups from all directions to the Jack tree; from the moment the first group arrives the evening chorus starts, the tempo of the chorus increases until the last groups have settled in evening concert, lasting usually for an hour. The next morning, around 5, the whole colony starts the morning chorus; almost simultaneously, all at the same time, suddenly cease to sing as if some one approaches the tree or may be for some other unknown reason. After a break of a few seconds the chorus would start again. The morning concert lasted well over an hour. Day after day the sparrows followed the same programme of arrival and departure from their roosting tree. The time would be regulated by the rising and the setting of the sun; the most striking factor is that during the monsoon the whole of the roosting colony drops entirely this morning and evening chorus.

Observations and experiments have revealed that light is the most favourable factor that induces the birds to sing. Analysis of the weather observations collected during the month of May reveals that the stagnant weather that prevailed during this month would be partially responsible for the retrospective behaviour of most of the birds in Khandala towards the end of May. For most of the time the sky was overcast with thin and low clouds. It is

evident that there is correlation between light and song. In cloudy weather the morning chorus is delayed until the light becomes brighter: in the instance under observation the morning chorus was delayed for an hour or more; when this happened, the morning chorus was very poorly attended, for by this time most birds had already dispersed into the nearby forest for their daily routine activities.

KAZIRANGA FOR BIRDS

F. M. Gauntlett

The publicity for Kaziranga is indicative of a rather blinkered attitude to wildlife conservation because in all the ballyhoo about rhinos there is little mention of anything else, least of all the rich birdlife. Even if there were no rhinoceroses, disastrous though this would be in other respects, Kaziranga would still be a major attraction particularly for the ornithologist.

My wife and I arrived in Kaziranga at about midday on 2.iii.1969 armed with the Birds of Burma, which, with all due respect to Dr Salim Ali, was the only work which covered the area at all adequately. Already, we had seen many Lesser Adjutant Storks from the National Highway from Jorhat, and the bird is supposed to be a shy forest species. It is certainly the common stork of the Assam Valley. Longbilled Vultures and Brahminy Kites were more numerous than in W. Bengal but were still outnumbered by Whitebacked Vultures and Pariah Kites.

As it apparently takes some time to organise the logistics of elephant rides in the Sanctuary (it was also siesta time) this could not take place till the following morning so we had the afternoon to explore the surroundings of the tourist lodge, which, with tea gardens in front and the slopes of the Mirkir Hills behind, looked interesting.

In the garden of the lodge itself Tree Sparrows were as numerous as House Sparrows and a small flowering shrub held White-eyes, Little Spiderhunter and the Yellowbacked Sunbird. Other birds in the immediate vicinity were Pied Flycatcher-Shrike, Bluethroated Barbet, Bronzed Drongo, and Verditer Flycatcher. Seen soon after were Haircrested Drongo, Rufousbacked Shrike, Bluetailed Bee-eater and Stonechat. Immediately behind the lodge we encountered our first problem; a small party of weavers feeding on the nectar of coral blossom. Apparently smaller and brighter coloured than Bayas, with conspicuous yellow eyebrows, cheeks and underparts, blackish on the back and wings with feathers edged buff forming two indistinct wing-bars. The

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

5

description fits well that of Golden Weaver which is supposed not to get any nearer than central Burma. Its habitat is large tracts of elephant grass and it may well wander in winter, who knows? A little further on, the shade trees of an experimental coffee plantation held Scarlet Minivet, Redbreasted Parakeet, Yellowbrowed Warbler and Redbreasted Flycatcher. A small stream contributed typical waterbirds such as Little Cormorant, Little Egret, Green Sandpiper, Yellowheaded and Pied Wagtails. Suddenly from the jungle across the stream came a cackling of maniacal laughter and across a clearing tumbled a flock of birds with glistening white bushy crested heads and rich red-brown bodies; Whitecrested Laughing Thrushes. We were to encounter these fairly regularly in scrubby jungle and I think they must be quite common in the area.) Along with them was a second species, grey-brown above with a long white-tipped tail. I think they were Black-gorgetted Laughing Thrushes. In the jungle were, appropriately enough, Jungle Mynas. The forest resounded with a chorus of various barbets, Bluethroated, Lineated, and Crimsonbreasted and also Spotted Doves to which Red Junglefowl occasionally joined in. Returning in the failing light a Broadbilled Roller was seen and was followed shortly after by a Jungle Nightjar starting up its single cylinder engine. As the list for the day included such old friends as Green Parakeet, Palm Swift, Roller, Red-rumped Swallow, Large Cuckoo-Shrike, Brown Shrike, Common Iora, Magpie Robin, Indian Robin, Tair Bird, Redvented and Redwhiskered Bulbuls, Spotted Munia, Common Myna, Pied Myna, Greyheaded Myna, Black Drongo, Ashy Swallow-Shrike, House Crow, Jungle Crow and Tree Pie the first day proved to be a promising beginning and we had not even sampled the Sanctuary itself.

After a very early call the following morning which we had been told was necessary to suit the arrangements made to visit the sanctuary, we waited $\frac{3}{4}$ hour before the Forest Department staff turned up. The delay was spent watching the unusual combination of tame white pigeons and wild Red Junglefowl finishing up the remains of the elephants' breakfast.

Arriving at the Sanctuary itself, Spotbilled Pelicans, Pallas's Sea Eagle, Swamp Partridge, Striated Weaver and Imperial Pigeon were soon in evidence as were Lesser Adjutant Storks which were quite a feature of the Sanctuary. It very soon became clear that the back of an elephant was a far from ideal platform from which to try and identify the numerous small brown jobs flitting about in the 4 m high grass. Even when the mahout understood our requests to halt to watch birds (an incomprehensible pastime to him), the elephant thought it was a good

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

6

opportunity to continue its interrupted breakfast. An elephant munching, interspersed with ill-mannered birps and hiccups is hardly any more stable. Various pipits, larks, wagtails, weavers, warblers, babblers and bulbuls escaped definite identification. (The suspension characteristics of individual elephants obviously vary, some glide quite smoothly but others roll like a drunken sailor with a wooden leg.) Stonechats were quite common and it was not until later that I found out they could have been, and probably were, Whitetailed Stonechats which have a particular preference for this sort of habitat.

After breakfast, another visit to the jungle produced Bluebeared Bee-eater and Crested Hawk Eagle, and I returned to be smugly told by my wife that she had seen a Shama in a patch of scrub near the lodge. I looked in this patch many times but never saw it. However, I did catch a brief glimpse of a bluish looking rail dropping into it, Elwes's Crake perhaps?

That afternoon another elephant trip had been arranged for us, this time to the seldom visited western end of the Sanctuary. The highlight was undoubtedly a magnificent tiger but a jheel with both Blacknecked and Black Storks and a Bengal Florican flushed right from the elephant's feet were not far behind. Another jheel had Night Herons, Purple Herons, Darters, Moorhens and Blackheaded Munias round the edges, Whiskered and Blackbellied Terns beating up and down over Spotbill Ducks and Mallards. An immature Tawny Eagle rounded off the trip.

Early next morning, there was another trip to the area of the Sanctuary first visited but by another route. A Striated Marsh Warbler singing lustily at the Sanctuary entrance was a good start and numerous coucals in the elephant grass appeared to be Lesser Coucals. These were soon followed by Storkbilled Kingfisher, Dusky Eagle Owl, Yellowbellied Wren-Warbler and the usual Lesser Adjutants, Pelicans and a Pallas's Sea Eagle.

By this time, the Forest Department staff were getting quite used to the idea of birdwatching and after breakfast one of them took us by car down a track deep into the Sanctuary to the Diphlu river to a belt of woodland with a large number of Silk Cotton trees in flower. On the way we saw Red Avadavat, Redcapped Babbler, Yellowfooted Green Pigeons, Eastern Blossomheaded Parakeets and a small parakeet-like bird which have been a Longtailed Broadbill but the circumstances make it rather unlikely. Swamp Partridges pattered about on the road like tame chickens and we stopped to look at a small jheel which contained a Greater Adjutant, several Lesser Adjutants, an immature Black Stork and half a dozen Pelicans.

At the Diphlu the trees were alive with birds, mostly Common, Jungle and Greyheaded mynas, Redvented and Redwhiskered bulbuls and Green Parakeets, but also Black Bulbuls,

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

7

Goldenfronted Chloropsis and a flock of birds I could not identify until later. Obviously closely related to Grey-headed Mynas but with black heads, chestnut underparts and a large whitish spot on each wing, they eventually turned out to be Spotwinged Stares. They were quite common and were seen later near the lodge itself. There were also Red-breasted Parakeets, a Fulvousbreasted Pied Woodpecker and a good variety of birds of prey included Pallas's Sea Eagle, Greyheaded Fishing Eagle, Crested Serpent Eagle and Spotted Eagle, and Junglefowl called from the undergrowth.

On the return journey I spotted to get a tape-recording of a colony of Redbreasted Parakeets in another belt of woodland when a noisy cheeping flock of small birds tumbled across a clearing. I think they were Marsh Spotted Babblers. The now almost inevitable Junglefowl added a background to the recording. Finally, a Lesser Scalybelled Green Woodpecker alighted in a tree just beside the car and an excellent morning was rounded off by a Tawny Eagle and two Pied Harriers.

A further visit to the jungle behind the lodge in the afternoon indicated its possibilities had still not been exhausted. A long tail sticking out of a bush was found to have a Greenbilled Malkoa at the front of it. Then two Pied Hornbills sailed over followed at intervals by a Shikra, then an Oriental Hobby. In the undergrowth were two Dark Grey Bush Chats and a party of small brown jobs scuttling through the grass. Some sort of bush warbler probably but the light was too poor. I also got a good look at a shrike, the like of which had been puzzling me several times already. It was a Tibetan Shrike.

We had to leave by noon the following day so had another early morning car trip down to the Diphlu river and on to another lodge, now apparently unused, almost on the other side of the sanctuary. Nobody seemed to give much thought as to what might happen if we encountered a rhino head-on on the narrow track flanked on both sides by a wall of elephant grass. Fortunately we came across nothing more fearsome than a startled Sambar.

This other lodge overlooked a small jheel which held a surprising variety of birds for its small size; Little Cormorant, Grey Heron, Large Egret, Little Egret, Paddy Bird, Spotbilled Duck, Greyheaded Fishing Eagle, Moorhen, Blackbellied and River terns, Storkbilled Kingfisher with Stonechat and Bluethroat round the edges.

Back at the main lodge with a couple of hours to kill before departure, a final quick look round still produced surprises in the jungle at the back in the form of two Large Wood Shrikes, a Yellowvented Flowerpecker and a Blackcrested Yellow Bulbul which provided a delightful farewell to Kaziranga.

Reluctantly we had to drag ourselves away and return to the horrors of civilisation after three remarkable days in which we had seen not only rhino, buffalo, tiger, swamp deer, hog deer, sambar and hog-badger but also over a hundred species of birds, nearly half of which were completely new to us.

BIRDS IN URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

Lavkumar J. Khacher

In the last couple of issues of the Newsletter there have been interesting notes on birds in cities as far apart as Khatmandu, Delhi and Bombay. In Notes and Comments of the October 1970 the Editor mentions his garden. How modest indeed! The Editor's garden is a veritable paradise and is inhabited by a variety of resident birds and Palm Squirrels, and visited by many migrants. It has been my privilege to have enjoyed the seclusion of this wonderful spot living in close proximity of the garden birds and it was here that I had my first introduction of the particular species of Palm Squirrel in a most amusing fashion. Of course when I was there last, the tall buildings had not sprung around and it was with some difficulty that I realized I was indeed living in one of India's largest cities, so rural the atmosphere was. At the time we had discussed the rapid expansion of the city with regret though accepting it as an inevitable and inexorable fact. But all along I refuse to accept the fact that Man must destroy his surroundings totally and I firmly hold the view that whereas we may be able to do little about the spread of cities, this spread does not have to be ugly. Most of the birds can and indeed do find it quite simple to live along with man. In fact we can complement one another. In the Old World where Man has been dominant for thousands of years and in India in particular, birds have easily adapted to human activities and where these have been harmonious with the environment, birds have gladly been accomodating. I saw my first Purplerumped Sunbird and Redwhiskered Bulbul in the small garden of the Taj Mahal Hotel. In Ahmedabad, Ashy Wren-warblers live cheerfully among scraggy hedges in the most congested localities. Of course, all species of birds are not so accomodating and a few are downright fastidious.

Very many more birds would inhabit our cities if, as our Editor suggests, a judicious planting of avenue trees and flowering plants in traffic islands and in parks and open plots were undertaken. Private individuals could grow shrubs and climbers in their city gardens and even in verandas to provide food and shelter for birds.

Keeping birds in view, a list of trees, shrubs and

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

9

climbers should be made for each city. All these should be species which need least care from climatic considerations. After this stipulation, I would place desirable plants in the following categories:

- i. Plants with tubular flowers containing nectar to attract sunbirds and the like as well as insects which give other species reason to be around.
- ii. Plants with an abundance of large leaves to which come Tailor Birds and Ashy Wren-Warblers for purposes of nesting.
- iii. Plants having an abundance of berries are lodestones to bulbuls and the like.
- iv. Densely growing and thorny plants are useful for nesting by bulbuls, babblers, doves, etc.

Many species of plants have more than one or all of the desired qualities and such plants are the most welcome.

If the programme could be taken up by the city authorities and private individuals, then our cities, howsoever congested, would become veritable bird sanctuaries. Imagine a tall skyscraper festooned with trailing vines and smothered in choice flowering plants. Could anything be more attractive?

Who indeed would deny that plants add colour, shade, and scent and as such are welcome indeed. Birds would add life, brilliance and song. In addition, birds would be effective insect killers, while plants would absorb the quantities of carbon dioxide thereby reducing the pollution of urban air and so help in making the cities cooler: carbon dioxide absorbs and retains heat. So, all in all, a little propaganda and we may well see our cities full of men, plants and birds. What a thought! How easily expressed yet . . . ?

SURVEY OF PESTICIDES POSITION IN INDIA

Datta Manchekar

In response to the Editor's call in the November 1970 issue of the Newsletter the following information may be found useful in the survey of pesticides position.

1. Manufacturers of Pesticides may be grouped as of:
a) Technical Material, and b) of Ready to use Dusts, Wettable Powders, Emulsifiable Concentrates, Household sprays and Granulated insecticides.

Among (a) such firms as Tata-Fison, Cyanamide India, Byers India, Agromore, Pesticides India Ltd, Ciba India, Sandoz India, Union Carbide and Hindusthan Pesticides Ltd

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

10

may be mentioned as the typical firms manufacturing among themselves such basic toxicants as Malathion, Rogor, Sevin, Warfarin, D.D.T., B.H.C. Zinc and Alluminium Phosphides, etc.

Some of the above firms along with many small units as Hindusthan Minerals, Standard Minerals, Bharat Pulverisers, Flintrock, etc. may be mentioned in group (b) whose capital outlay may be between 2 and 5 lakhs. Significantly most of these firms are located in Western India except for half a dozen in other states in south and northeast. The type (b) prospered on account of large scale Government orders during the first 2 plans and are suffering a slump since because they have no direct sales apparatus.

All these firms are required to be registered with the Department of Industries of the respective states. I am not aware of any Central Rules regarding registration, except for the reasons for Import quota requirements, of either the firms or the pesticides.

However, India has so far not developed any new Pesticide and ISI and other standards are based on Federal Agricultural law U.S.A. and B.S.I.

2. The Pesticides may be grouped as: i) Rodenticides, ii) Fungicides, iii) Fumigants, iv) Insecticides and v) Weedicides. I may be able to give you a detailed list of Technical materials and their Trade names given by each marketing firm. For instance, Parathion is sold by Byers as Folidol and by Sandoz as Ecatox. Malathion is made popular as antibug insecticide under the different trade names as Knock '99, Bug Mar, Mala-mar, Tic-20, etc.

At consumer level Pesticides are used for Agriculture by: a) Farmers, b) Government and Aerial spraying contractors as Cumbatas, c) Poultry and Animal farms and d) Governmental Research farms, etc. Besides these Urban Pesticides Service agencies and Municipalities as well as Malaria eradication programme authorities and Armed forces handle Pesticides. The householder also need not be forgotten.

3. As regards safety and caution in the use of Pesticides, there are only passive rules compelling the marketers to mention the Dangers and Antidotes etc. on the labels and for specifications in Packing etc. Otherwise there are many loose ends. For instance though Parathion is restricted for its formulation licencing Endrin, an equally dangerous pesticide is left free. It is reported to have caused many deaths. Moreover, there are no penal provisions against deliberate misuse of Pesticides, except of course in case of human beings. I was reported of a case where a Leopard was killed by feeding Endrin on a carcass. This was in Ratnagiri some two years ago. Very often, language papers report cattle allegedly killed by aerial sprays of Pesticides such as Endrin.

4. I am myself not systematic in keeping any account of ecological effects of Pesticides use. Moreover, I have no knowledge of any organisation doing this useful work. I would have loved to exchange information on this important subject if I had known any. However, National Institute of Communicable Diseases, New Delhi, Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi, Entomological Society of India, Delhi 12 are some of the apex bodies who should be in the know of these facts. I.A.R.I. has a set of excellent publications (Periodicals) giving out research information who should not be averse to our project.

The above is a general basic information sketched out of my personal observation and contacts. I shall be pleased to lend my services to the Birdwatchers' Field Club in its useful pursuit. I am not aware of the responsibilities involved in the role of a co-ordinator of this Survey. However, you may depend on me for whatever services you feel like extracting from me to promote judicious use of the double-edged weapon.

BREVITY AND BIRD NAMES

D. A. Stairmand

My earlier comments have induced a certain amount of 'inbrevity' (a new subspecies) from Mr F. M. Gauntlett in his reply and elaboration on the above subject in Newsletter 10(12): 2-6. I wish to reply to Mr Gauntlett's remarks so far as they concern my own stand. Persons well qualified may wish to air their views on the elaborations of Mr Gauntlett.

Firstly I wish to state that my original comments were made because Mr Gauntlett was advocating certain changes in the cause of brevity. I would have read 'Green Parakeet' and passed on without a moment's hesitation had it not been for Mr Gauntlett's comment 'why do all the books have to be so long-winded and call it Roseringed?' My thoughts on reading this comment were 'Is life so hectic, these days that we do not have time to write or say a word such as 'Roseringed'? Well, if life really is so hectic surely it is high time that we attempted to find time again and relax a bit. There are many killing effects, in different ways, due to the present stresses, strains and pace of modern living and I hope that it will be appreciated that my line of thought was that if we could not relax and take it easy with our bird books we could hardly expect to relax and take it easy in any other part of our lives. To advocate expediency in the matter of 'Green' instead of 'Roseringed' is the antithesis of my attitude towards the subject of writing or reading about birds. I personally do not decry everything that is Victorian. EHA was literally 'a Victorian' and his writings even, or perhaps especially, today are a pure delight.

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

112

What I think should be avoided as far as possible is ugliness in word and style and I fear that if we are all in such a hurry that we do not have time to write or say a word such as 'Roseringed' ugliness will be the end result. Mr Gauntlett took this point of mine very well in the last paragraph of his article.

I would take this opportunity to state that I would rather refer to a person as an 'eccentric' than as a 'nut case' and perhaps Dr Fleming's use of 'Titmouse' is not so old fashioned as I notice that this word is used in that excellent book Birds of the World by Oliver L. Austin Jr, which was published less than 10 years ago.

So those are my reasons for having raised this issue. I will now deal more specifically with Mr Gauntlett's remarks regarding my own comments.

Mr Gauntlett quotes Whistler as using 'Green Parakeet' (actually 'Parrakeet' in those days) in his Popular Handbook published in 1928 but goes on to say that my choice of 'Large Indian Parakeet' for comparison was perhaps unfortunate. It may be noted, however, that Whistler in this same book labels Psittacula eupatria 'The Large Indian Parrakeet'. You cant have your cake and eat it. Whistler's Popular Handbook was Mr Gauntlett's choice not mine. My nomenclature was taken from Ind. Handbook Vol. 3. As I hinted in my original comments 'Green' and 'Large' would probably be amplified to 'Small Green Parakeet' and 'Large Green Parakeet' thereby negating the effect desired by Mr Gauntlett. A possible reason why 'Roseringed' was introduced, or perhaps re-introduced, was that 'Green' was considered unsatisfactory and I would be interested to know the facts regarding this.

Mr Gauntlett states 'If Mr Stairmand is still in favour of using English names for each subspecies perhaps he would care to suggest a solution to the following problem' and then sets me an algebraic problem for the solution of which I would have had to have attempted to recall Einstein from his grave. Fortunately (for me and Einstein) I have never indicated that I am in favour of English names for each subspecies. What I wrote about the Indian Scavenger Vulture was quite patently in specific regard to that bird. My objection to Mr Gauntlett's 'Egyptian Vulture' was that the known range of this bird is nowhere near Bengal. Ind. Handbook Vol. 1 states, in respect of distribution of the nominate race's appearances in our area, West Pakistan and NW. India 'possibly straggling into U.P., Kutch, W. Rajasthan, etc.' I understand from an earlier article of Mr Gauntlett that he possesses powerful binoculars supplemented by a zoom telescope but to see all the way across Bihar into U.P. is stretching things a

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

13

bit, I think; and the bird is termed only a possible straggler into that area. So, circumstantially at least, only the Indian Scavenger Vulture would be seen in Bengal. I would mention here a rather apparent difference between the Indian Scavenger Vulture and the Egyptian Vulture. The former has the bill yellow in adults as against dark horny at all stages in the latter. These birds are seen, not infrequently, at fairly close quarters on the ground and I doubt that the Egyptian Vulture would have been overlooked all these years in Bengal. I did proffer 'Neophron' which has its antecedents.

I think it is erroneous to say that birds are forced to bear long names. Admittedly, if a man gives his son the name of, say, Royston Arlington Spangler Smith that boy is forced to bear the name. But a Whitethroated Fantail Flycatcher wouldnt give a dam what you called it.

While Mr Lavkumar J. Kacher is filling in idle moments tapping out nostalgic and romantic memories few readers will be in doubt how Messrs Gauntlett and Stairmand have spent their evenings!

NOTES AND COMMENTS

The Editor wishes all members of the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India a very Happy New Year.

It might seem as if the Newsletter has started off badly because of lack of a printed cover. The fact is that the covers which we have been using last year have been admittedly rather second rate, and it was intended that we would start the issues of 1971 with something better. During the recent visit of the Editor to London he had the good fortune of meeting Mr Stuart Melliush who apart from being such a generous friend of the Newsletter is also a competent artist. He has offered to make a sketch of the cover based on some excellent photographs of Indian birds taken by Peter Jackson.

It was hoped that Mr Melliush would send in a sketch sometime in December, but unfortunately this has not yet arrived.

Annual General Meeting

We had sent you a notice regarding the Tenth Annual General Meeting of the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India which was scheduled to be held on Saturday, the 16th January 1971 at the residence of the Editor at Juhu Lane, Andheri.

Unfortunately Dr Salim Ali will be out of Bombay on that day and the meeting will be now held on Saturday, the 23rd January 1971 at 5 p.m. at the same place.

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

14

We hope that all the members in Bombay will be able to come and others will send in their suggestions for improving the Newsletter and for stimulating the activities of the Club.

The Honorary Secretary apologizes for his somewhat 'sleeping partner' attitude during 1970.

International Wildfowl Census

Mr C. W. Savage, 11F Gulburga, Lahore, W. Pakistan, has played a notable part in organizing the International Wildfowl Census every year. Readers will recall that in the past we have circulated the Survey Forms and many members of our Club have taken the trouble to send back these forms to the Editor for transmission to Mr Savage. We hope that this year too that a careful effort would be made to assess the population of Wildfowl in various parts of the country. Needless to say that it is most important that the returns as far as the identity of the species is concerned must be unimpeachable. It is quite possible to be somewhat off the mark as far as numbers are concerned. The questionnaire is enclosed in the Newsletter.

CORRESPONDENCE

Winter visitors at Bandra Creek

On 22nd November 1970 we were driving towards Tulsi via the Western Express Highway (Bandra). At the beginning of the Highway just after the bridge our attention was drawn by a large number of waterbirds on the marsh as well as near the edge of the waters of the creek. We hurriedly scanned but could not wait long. We hence went again on 26th November morning for a leisurely view and found that there were almost hundreds of Blackwinged Stilts (Himantopus himantopus) with their lanky pinkish legs and almost jet black wings. The wings assumed pointed triangular shape in flight while the long legs trailed behind. While the majority of them had pure white head and neck there were some with a touch of faint grey on head. They were all in scattered patches and stood in a row with patience.

Along with the stilts were the Redshank and Sandpipers. The Redshank (Tringa totanus) however was solitary and unfortunately had one of its red legs lame. In flight from above, we diagnosed its broad white band at the outer edge of its wings. There were also small flocks of Wood Sandpiper (Tringa glareola) and the Common Sandpiper (Tringa

hypoleucos). Seeing them together with the Redshank afforded a good opportunity in identification. The Wood Sandpiper had no wing-bar in flight while the common one had a prominent white bar.

A Pond Heron or Paddybird) was sitting alone crouched and morose. On the marsh we also came across two White Wagtails running and lying across the dried portions of the marsh.

Vipin Parikh
Vijay Bhatt
2nd Khetwadi Lane, Bombay 4

Crows as destroyers of mosquitoes

I recently observed that crows, especially the House Crows are great destroyers of mosquitoes. There is a pool of stagnant water nearby which is full of mosquitoes which breed in it. Every morning I see that a few crows gather there and they snap at the flying mosquitoes. This shows the usefulness of a bird which looks obnoxious and is a big bully to many beautiful birds in the garden. But the usefulness of this bird as an efficient destroyer of pests and as a scavenger should not be ignored.

Kameshwar Pd. Singh
A.N.S. College, P.O. Barh
Bihar, Patna Dist

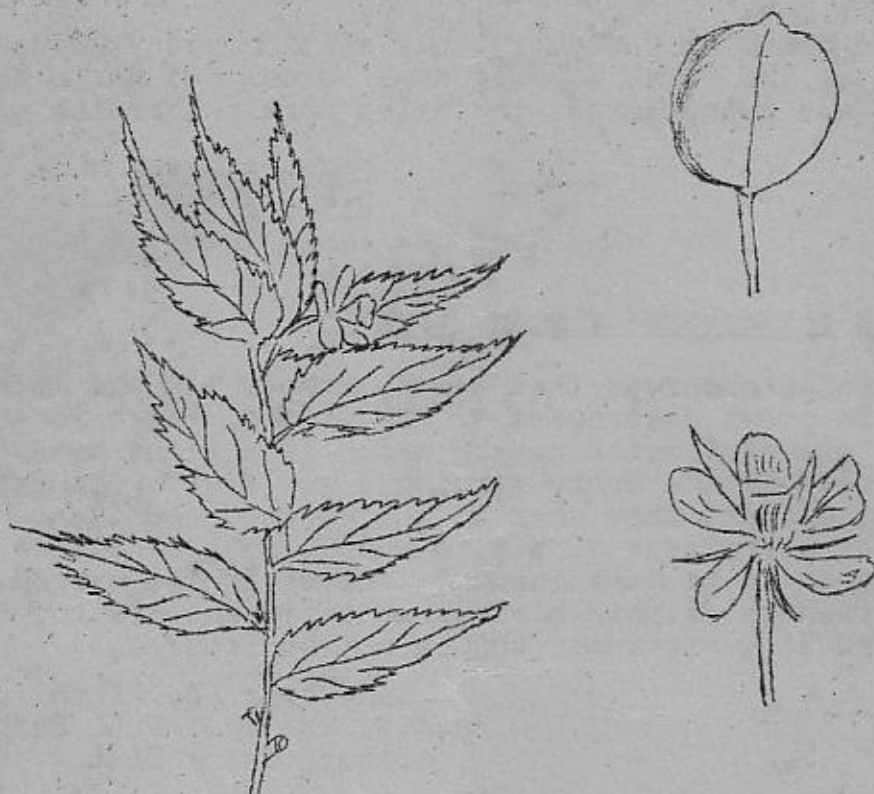
A tree that attracts birds: Muntingia calabura

Mr F. M. Gauntlett in his nice article 'Birds in a Bengal Garden', Newsletter 10(10), has requested the readers to identify the tree, in his garden, which attracts so many birds throughout the seasons.

From the description given, I think the small tree is Muntingia calabura. It is popularly called Chinese Cherry. But it is not a real Cherry which belongs to the genus Prunus. It is so called because its berries outwardly resemble those of the cherry.

This small tree has wide spreading branches which often droop downwards so that the outermost twigs come near the ground. The narrow pointed leaves are oblique, and serrate and are arranged on very short stalks in one plane on opposite sides of the branches. The leaves are smooth above and silvery-tomentose below. The small white flowers having 5 sepals and 5 petals are borne singly on long stalks from above the axils. The petals last for one day only. The fruit is a red berry like that of cherry but unlike a cherry contain a number of small seeds in a watery pulp. Fruits of genus Prunus generally contain one

or two seeds only.



MUNTINGIA CALABURA

The plant is a native of tropical America and has been introduced in this country, particularly in Bengal, within the last half of a century. The flowers and the fruits appear almost all the year round and the ripe juicy berries are very attractive to fruit-eating birds. As suggested by Mr Gauntlett bird-lovers having some space may plant this tree in their gardens. It grows very rapidly and spreads a showy canopy. For a sapling one may contact the Secretary of the Royal Agri-Horticultural Society of India, 1 Alipore Road, Calcutta 27.

Ananta Mitra
6/1 Prince Anwar Shah Road
Calcutta 33

Zafar Futehally
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers
32A Juhu Lane
Andheri, Bombay 58-AS

NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS
VOL 11 NO 2 -1971 FEB



NEWSLETTER FOR

BIRDWATCHERS

Volume XI Number 2

February 1971

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Birds of the Dandeli Sanctuary By S.G. Neginhal | 1 |
| Miking with Birds by Owen Martin | 6 |
| On Woodpeckers and other matters By K.D. Ghorpade | 9 |
| The Tenth Annual General Meeting | 12 |
| Notes and Comments | 14 |
| Correspondence: | 15 |
| Redstart from Mrs Sarah Jameson | |
| Out on the prowl again from D.A. Stairmand | |
| <u>Trema orientalis</u> from S.G. Neginhal | |

BIRDS OF THE DANDELI SANCTUARY

S.G. Neginhal

One will be startled to know that the Dandeli Sanctuary, well-known for its wild animals, also harbours one of the richest Avifauna. This sanctuary is situated in the Western Ghats of North Kanara District of Mysore State. The forest is mostly a moist deciduous type, containing timber trees of Teak, Rosewood, Nandi, Matti, Kindal, Heddi, etc., and Bamboos. The area of the Sanctuary is 206 sq. K.M. I had the good fortune of living in this area from July 1969 to July 1970, which offered an excellent opportunity of Bird Watching vis-a-vis the fascinating wild animals like Elephants, Bisons, Sambars, Spotted deer, Tigers and Panthers, etc. I could not devote my whole time on this bird-watching, as I had to be busy on my professional forestry works. Hence I could cover only some birds.

When I joined at Kulgi, a Central place of the Sanctuary, the South-West monsoon was in full swing. On one July morning,

when it was not raining, I spotted 2-3 pairs of Spotted Doves (*Streptopelia chinensis*) leisurely hunting insects in my large compound. A lone yellow-coloured Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla caspica*), running about and wagging its tail, was noticed not far from the Spotted Doves. This Grey Wagtail was seen up to April. The Spotted Doves turned out to be the resident birds of this locality. The other Wagtail I saw occasionally, during this period, was the Large Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*) with its conspicuous white eyebrow. By late July, as the rains receded the Indian Pipits (*Anthus novaeseelandiae*), rather in appearance like the female house-sparrow started visiting my compound. It was a pleasure to observe these **pipits, sharply running about and suddenly stopping to hunt their prey.** The Bluetailed Bee-eaters (*Merops philippinus*) were spotted on the hedges when the rains were heavy in July-August. These suddenly disappeared, when the monsoon ended in October. But their cousins, the common Green Bee-eaters (*Merops orientalis*), stayed on throughout the year, perching on the telephone line. Large numbers of these birds collected with much noise to roost in a nearby *Terminalia tomentosa* tree in the evenings. I observed an interesting habit of these birds. When the sun is setting in the evening, these birds sit puffed, touching shoulders to shoulder in a line on small branches of a big tree - facing invariably the setting sun in the West. It would be interesting to find out what direction they would be facing at the time of dawn, and as to how the other birds behave in this respect.

As the season stepped into August/September the brilliant coloured Sunbirds and Flower-Peckers started flitting from tree to tree and flowers to flowers. They were identified to be the Purple Sunbird (*Nectarinia asiatica*), the Purplerumped Sunbird (*Nectarinia zeylonica*), the Yellowbacked Sunbird (*Aethopyga siparaja*) the Tickell's Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*). From this time onwards were seen the Green Bulbuls - the Gold-fronted *Chloropsis* (*Chloropsis aurifrons*) - on the inflorescence of the Eucalyptus trees, hanging up and down for their nectar.

In October, when the monsoon was over, the quiet little greenish-yellow Common Ioras (*Aegithina tiphia*) announced their arrival on the trees by their quiet note of we-e-e-e-tu. These were

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

3

lovely arboreal birds, with white bars across the dark wings, lower plumage deep yellow and greenish below the breast. These moved in pairs. On the far off *Terminalia paniculata* trees were seen the contrasting flocks of Scarlet Minivets (*Pericrocotus flammeus*) and Small Minivets (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*) in lovely colours of bright scarlet and glistening black in male, and yellow and dark plumage in the female. These were shy natured.

On the telephone wires, opposite my office, the glossy Steel blue Common Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) and the Redrumped Swallows (*Hirundo daurica*) were seen perching from October to April. Occasionally the Wiretailed Swallows (*Hirundo smithii*) were seen. A cousin of these Swallows - the Dusky Crag Martin (*Hirundo concolor*) - was traced at the nearby Syke's Point, ever-wheeling in the air over the famous crag there.

I saw only two types of Kingfishers and Drongos in this area. The Kingfishers were the Common Kingfishers (*Alcedo atthis*) and the Whitebreasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*), the latter used to come far away from water source to visit my compound. The White-bellied Drongo (*Dicrurus caerulescens*) was seen throughout the year; and the graceful Racket-tailed Drongo (*Dicrurus paradiseus*) came during the winter and stayed up to summer.

I have seen all the three types of parrakeets in this area. The Alexandrine Parrakeet (*Psittacula eupatria*) with its rose-pink collar, a deep red bill, red shoulder patches was the most majestic. The smaller edition was the Roseringed Parrakeet (*Psittacula krameri*), without the red patch on the wings but with a black ring round the neck. Still smaller was the Blossom-headed Parrakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*) with its bluish red head (male) and an orange-yellow beak. All these Parrakeets were seen throughout the year. Mention must be made here of the "Lilliputian" Parrakeets I used to see feeding on the nectar of the inflorescence of the *Eucalyptus* trees. These were the Lorikeets (*Loriculus vernalis*), in appearance a baby parrakeet with a bright green colour, conspicuous crimson rump and a coral red bill. These were very suspicious arboreal birds, - never gave me a chance to go nearer to them with my binoculars.

In October/November the Malabar Whistling Thrush (*Myiophonus horsfieldii*) was heard whistling deeply in the early dawn. At the beginning of November some large "Zebra" marked birds started thoroughly inspecting the *Cassia ferrungina* trees, behind my quarters, for insects. These came in pairs and in absolute silence. These were the Large Cuckoo-Shrikes (*Coracina novaehollandiae*).

In November, after the rains were over and the winter had commenced the heavy-billed Hornbills commenced visiting the Sanctuary forests in flocks from the Eastern direction. The Malabar Pied Hornbill (*Anthracoceros coronatus*) had a horn-shaped yellowish bill. The Malabar Grey Hornbill (*Tockus griseus*) was casqueless above its bill. The largest of these species was rarely come across - the Great Indian Hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*).

Which are the woodpeckers found in this area? I could spot out two beautiful species, as the rains receded. The Golden-backed woodpecker (*Dinopium benghalense*) was the largest one with the upper plumage mainly black (I could not see its golden-yellow colour !!) The Mahratta Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos maharattensis*) was comparatively too small and was rarely come across.

One day, in early November, some brilliantly yellow-coloured birds, silently moving in the foliage of a *Trema orientalis* tree attracted my attention. These were the pretty Golden Orioles (*Oriolus oriolus*) and the Blackheaded Orioles (*Oriolus xanthornus*). It was a prized sight to see them on a single tree. One early morning of this month, while passing below a tall *Adina cordifolia* tree, some pleasant musical whistles startled me to look up, only to see a flock of lovely common Green Pigeons (*Treron phoenicoptera*) basking in the early winter Sun. They had lovely lilac patches on their shoulders. The winter had brought down on earth a paradise for a bird-watcher. Suddenly on a fine morning of early December the Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*) came down on the dusty road, walking and running with a peculiar gate, probing with its long, slender bill into the dust for insects and their larvae. This withdrew from the scene as the South-West monsoon advanced in June later.

The attractive Grey Jungle fowls (*Gallus sonneratii*), which were so profuse about a decade ago, were now found scarcely on the forest roads. This may be due to the much disturbance of the forest floor caused during the extraction of bamboos by the Paper mills, Dandeli. The only Quail found was the Jungle Bush Quail (*Perdica asiatica*). No Partridges were to be seen.

The other birds I saw were no less lively. Amongst the hawks, the Shikra-hawk (*Accipiter badius*) was seen often. Flocks of Jungle Babblers (*Turdoides striatus*) were hopping about and flying low on the ground. The House Swifts (*Apus affinis*) were seen flying near the culverts. The pied Bushchat (*Saxicola caprata*) and the Magpie - Robin (*Copsychus saularis*) were often noticed, but their similar coloration (in male) often confused their identification. The Crow-Pheasant (*Centropus sinensis*) was often seen stalking on the ground. The mouse-like Nuthatches-

both Chestnut-bellied (*Sitta castanea*) and Velvetfronted (*Sitta frontalis*) were occasionally found actively moving up and down the branches and trunks. A lone Blue Jay (*Coracias benghalensis*) was found sitting on the telephone wire from November onwards. During the monsoons this was not traceable. Two Bulbuls - the Redvented (*Pycnonotus cafer*) and the Redwhiskered (*Pycnonotus jocosus*) - were quite plenty throughout the year. One late evening a Tailor bird (*Orthotomus sutorius*) was found chirping on a bamboo twig, calling her mate to return home! After the rains were over the Nightjars (*Caprimulgus asiaticus*) were seen hawking insects in the moonlight. Our National bird - the Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) were spotted near the Syke's point and the Kansirda tank. The common myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) was seen throughout the year as also the House Crow (*Corvus splendens*) and the Jungle Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*). The Brahminy Myna (*Sturnus pagodarum*) was occasionally seen. The Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) was found with the grazing cattle. They are even reported to be found following the grazing **Bisons and Sambars**, which prize I could not bag. One day I saw the Bengal Vultures (*Gyps bengalensis*) hovering over some unknown dead wild animal - an Elephant or a Bison! - in the far off valley. The House sparrow was conspicuously absent.

The romantic bird - the Koel (*Eudynamys scolopacea*) - silent and unseen in the rainy season and early winter suddenly erupted into melodious notes, heralding the spring in March. The prettiest bird I saw during the summer from April to May was the Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*). The Whitespotted Fantail Flycatcher (*Rhipidura albogularis*) with its striking, perky, cocked and fanned out tail was found in the driver tracts of the Sanctuary.

There are a number of ponds and water tanks in the Sanctuary. The Kalinadi river borders the Sanctuary on two sides. These water sources offer excellent opportunities for observing the water-birds, side by side the famous wild life of the Sanctuary. At these spots I spotted the Paddy Bird (*Ardeola grayii*), the Spotbill (*Anas poecilorhyncha*), the Little Grebe (*Podiceps ruficollis*), the Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*), the River Tern (*Sterna aurantia*), the Redwattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*), the Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*) the Purple Moorhen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) the Coot (*Fulica atra*) and the Bronze-winged Jacanas (*Metopidius indicus*) and the Darter (*Anhinga rufa*).

MIKING WITH BIRDS

Owen Martin

Since first hearing Ludwig Koch's splendid bird song records I have had the urge to make some myself. So when I acquired a portable recorder I was very keen to try it on our own local birds.

Before I tell you how I fared, I think I should describe the bird aspect of the outer London suburb in which we live. It is a typical suburb with miles and miles of roads and houses, but there are public parks and woodland, and many private gardens with the usual lawns, flower beds, vegetable patches, hedges and orchards which make oases in the brick and concrete desert. There is also a human populace which is at least tolerant of birds, so for those species which have learned to accept man and his many undesirable ways, this is attractive territory - plenty of food both natural and man-provided, numerous and varied nesting sites, and good places to roost. So it supports a bird population far higher than that of the open country, and although the number of species is low (I have logged only 32 regulars in our garden) volume makes up for variety.

We thus have plenty of bird song, and when I took the recorder into the garden for the first trial I felt reasonably sure that I would get at least some bird sounds on to the tape. It was mid-April and I was out well before dawn; the air smelt good and it was mild: maybe a real Spring day was in store for us at last. And it was quiet - but not for long as suddenly, from the Cherry tree only a few feet above my head, our resident Robin broke into song. There was just enough light to make out his silhouette and to see the puffs of condensation from his beak at each burst of sound. For a minute he was on his own, then came the challenging answer from his rival down the road. This was a really superb duet, and in my anxiety to get it on to the record I dropped the microphone, fumbled the starting switch and adjusted the Tone Control instead of Volume. But at last things were set - and the recorder was working!

Soon the other birds came in. First one Blackbird then another; then Song Thrushes, Tits, Greenfinches, Dunnocks, Chaffinches, Carrion Crows, a Tawny Owl, a cock Pheasant - the lot! This was terrific stuff and I was trembling with excitement when the tape ran out twenty minutes later, with the chorus still going full blast.

The first play-back was equally thrilling, but the next replay began to show up the faults. The dawn chorus was all there very loud and very clear; so too were less attractive sounds, and I began to learn the lesson of unwanted Background Noise. A Boing at London Airport has almost drowned the Tawny, and surely there could not have been all that traffic in our road at that early hour? And what was that peculiar thumping and pumping that competed with one of the Song Thrushes? It was mysterious until I recognised my own hearbeats and not-so-subdued smoker's wheeze. I now have a reminder pasted on to the recorder - "Don't breath into the mike".

Background noise is a nuisance and difficult to avoid. If it's there, you just have to wait until it stops, or put up with it. But happily not all is objectionable: I have a pleasing record of a Willow Warbler in duet with his rival, with a distant village clock chiming in the background; and a jangling bullock cart makes a nice accompaniment for the Saurus Cranes at Keoladeo Ghana - but more of that anon.

Some birds are just too easy to record, others infuriatingly difficult. The confident, persistent singers are the easy ones, particularly those with constantly used song perches. With them it may be only a matter of walking up and offering them the microphone, and for those who resent a direct approach it is simple to rig up the mike with a long lead and work the recorder from nearby cover.

In the more difficult category are the less persistent singers, and the skulkers and flitters of the treetops and undergrowth. They use no song posts but whistle as they work, as it were. Some of the warblers in particular are this way inclined, and to get them on the record entails waiting around in the hope of being in the right place at the right time. Singers and callers on the wing, the larks, and the waders, wildfowl and raptors - are even more audibly elusive, and I have not yet been able to record any of them well.

I have tried with limited success to record the other noises made by our garden birds - their call notes, sub-songs and conversational chattering. The naturally garrulous species seem to derive considerable satisfaction and stimulus from communal chatter sessions and Starlings at these times engage in mimicry of the other birds whose territories they share. Last Winter we had one who made perfect imitations of the lovely call of the Curlew, a bird one is not likely to see or hear within less than 50 miles of our house. I thus suspect that this individual was one of the many Winter migrants we get from Northern England and Continental Europe. To ponder where he learned the Curlew call is tantalizing.

Our Goldfinches too are great talkers. During the Winter the garden flock - or should I use the old English collective noun for these birds: 'charm'? - builds up to about 24, attracted by the seeds of the teasles we grow for their special pleasure. The microphone placed in the Teazle clump collects some remarkable sounds. There is the usual pugnacious bad language during competition for a particularly attractive seed head, and also a continuous flow of contact calls. With practice, and until late Autumn, one can distinguish adult voices from those of juveniles of the year.

Sub-songs are difficult to record as the mike must be much nearer to the singer and I have succeeded once, and only partially, with a Blackbird. This was a known and easily recognised individual who had allowed the taping of his full song earlier in the year, and I was surprised to find from comparing the two records that the sub-song was not merely a subdued replica; it was different in key and rhythm. Whether this applies for all sub-songs I do not know.

To revert to India, I brought the recorder with me on my last visit, and G.S. Ranganathan and I tried it first at Keoladeo Ghana. It was in April and the Saurus Cranes were courting loudly. We made some splendid tape and were pleased with one bit in particular for as well as the bullock cart we caught other pleasant noises - gurgling water, plonking frogs and a not too strident cricket. Unfortunately that piece of the record had to be stopped suddenly: I wonder if I dare suggest that the Warden fits a silencer to his motor bike?

We made possibly our most successful record one evening as we were heading back to the Rest House. From reeds alongside a bund came a terrifically loud song; challenging, urgent, enthusiastic - and not known to either of us: "Tockety tockety frogety tock tock....." And would the singer show himself? He would not. G.S.R. suspected a Great Reed Warbler, and a playback later to Dr. Salim Ali confirmed that he was right.

In the morning from the Rest House balcony we made some good Indian dawn chorus records which make an interesting comparison with my English ones. There were Bulbuls and Parakeets, Magpie Robin and Drongo, Pied Kingfisher and Peacock, Purple Sunbird and Doves - and of course the Crows, Jungle and House, and many more. Background noises were there but not too obtrusive - pot banging and gossip from the kitchen, and the inevitable human dawn chorus of throat clearing. That I suppose would be classed as essential local colour.

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

9

We also made a recording of the "Yocle yockle....." of the Indian Nightjar one evening at Karnala. This was a new sound to me, and quite unlike the continuous, low-pitched churring of the European Nightjar; in fact I at first thought we were listening to some kind of owl. After making the record we played it back at maximum volume with quite startling results as our Nightjar responded at considerably increased speed to challenge a suspected rival in his territory. I made the mental note that this playback technique might possibly encourage birds within range of my camera; this has yet to be tried in practice.

Our final recording attempt was in the Editor's lovely garden at Andheri where we hoped to catch the Koel's evening clamour. This was not to be as the clamour we heard was different and unexpected: "Oom pah pah, oom pah pah" from a very near and very loud nuptial brass band.

You see what I mean about background noise?

ON WOODPECKERS AND OTHER MATTERS

K. D. Ghorpade

When I wrote that initial article describing the alleged destructive habit of the Blackbacked Woodpecker, my main intention was, as I have already pointed out, to bring it to the notice of fellow birdwatchers and to find out if such a habit has been seen, read or heard of by any of them. Unfortunately (probably due to faulty presentation by myself and/or misinterpretation by Mr. Neelakantan and Mr. Lavkumar), things got a little out of hand and I was credited with a view that I was bent on proving that all woodpeckers were harmful to coconut and other fruit; and hence on promulgating their extermination in the interest of our economy and the benefit of the Indian peasant. So, instead of getting an answer to my problem, I found myself plumb in the middle of a heated debate in the defence of woodpeckers and on the urgent need for the conservation of our natural environment, including our bird life. The only consolation I derived from all this discussion was that indirectly I had managed to provoke a very welcome exchange of views, ideas and information on a particular topic, which unhappily, is such an uncommon feature in the Newsletter.

But, in a way, from the several articles that have appeared on the apparent injurious habit of the Blackbacked Woodpecker, I have come to a sort of conclusion on the subject which prompts me to close (temporarily) the argument over this controversial subject with the following comments and observations:-

Since no one has confirmed the alleged destructive habit of this woodpecker to coconut fruit and opinion has been contrary to the allegation, it may be tentatively presumed that such a habit does not exist and that the damage done to the coconuts may be attributed to some other factor; thus leaving the woodpecker in the clear for the present. Henceforth, more attention could be paid by birdwatchers in the country to the food habits of the indigenous Picidae; to establish exactly what percentage fruit occupies in the woodpeckers' normal diet in different regions and conditions. Even if a woodpecker, or for that matter any bird assumes pest proportions (i.e. causes damage to a crop to such an extent that it comes in the way of successful and profitable production of that crop), extermination --- either by shooting or by other methods such as poisoning by spraying the crop with suitable pesticides or by poison-baiting --- is not the primary means of reducing bird damage; in fact, measures currently in use against bird-pests of agriculture include bird-scaring by noise, by a man on guard with a catapult, by the traditional 'Scarecrow', or more recently by the mechanical bird-scaring device specially manufactured for this purpose. Against woodpecker pests, we could benefit by adopting the measures practiced by the United States as suggested by Mr. Serrao [Newsletter 10(11): 7-9.]

Prof. Neelakantan and Kunvar Shri Lavkumar have probably taken a strong objection to my having shot the woodpecker, resulting in their frantic appeals for curbing man's inborn desire to kill, and for the absolute necessity for sane naturalists to close their ranks and go all out for the cause of conservation. At this point let me make it clear that I had shot the woodpecker not so much to please the local peasants or to prevent it from destroying my coconuts as I had for possessing a skin of this uncommon species for scientific purposes. If I so desired and found necessary, I could have killed all the woodpeckers that entered our estate, but needless to say I did not do so. As to Mr. Lavkumar's opinion that further acquisition of bird skins has now become unnecessary, I would like to take him up on that matter, and will discuss this later on in this article.

It is no doubt true that the need for conservation in recent years has doubled, and that this current awareness and concern for the preservation of our natural wealth could not have come at a more appropriate moment; but a distinction has to be made between the type of conservation required in different regions and countries of the world, and the diverse forms of animal and plant life to be given special thought and consideration. Surely this present crusade in the worthy cause of nature conservation does not intend to pronounce a complete stoppage in the killing of any kind of animal anywhere in the world, does it? It is probably for this reason that the IUCN

is preparing its 'Red List' of animals in immediate danger of extinction, so that concentrated efforts are made to protect at least these seriously endangered animals. Similarly it is hoped that this laudable International body dedicated towards the cause of conservation will come up with scientific suggestions that will help us to take better care of our environment in future.

What I am trying to get at is this: in the name of conservation we need not prohibit the killing of a species which, at present is in no danger of extinction. On the other hand, every effort must be made to protect and conserve the species that are threatened; there can be no doubt about that. At least for systematic studies and other scientific research we will need specimens of animals (including birds) from different parts of the world, some parts of which, including India are inadequately explored and their fauna (especially insects) poorly known. Therefore, it is being very pedantic and unrealistic to suggest the stoppage of killing of all animals, and going to the extent of saying that no more scientific specimens, even among birds which are the best known animal group in the world today (98 per cent of the probably existing species and subspecies being known) are needed by museums and museum workers. In India alone, the glaring gaps in the knowledge of our birds and the lack of bird skins from many parts of the country and of many species is revealed by Mr. Humayun Abdulali in his commendable catalogue of the bird specimens in the collection of the Bombay Natural History Society (JBNHS 65: 182 et seq.). It is now an established fact that the days of random collection of a large number of bird specimens from different parts of our subcontinent are gone; but what is really needed now is the careful acquisition of small series of different species from areas where such specimens are not available in museums as evident from Mr. Abdulali's Catalogue. Such series would not only help in the knowledge of the exact distribution of each species in our area but also in the more correct delimitation of the different subspecies of each species, the precise range inhabited by each subspecies with the areas of intergradation, and an idea of the amount of natural variation that exists within a species, with the effect of various environmental and genetic factors over this variation. These fundamental and applied studies, especially in India, are a must for the better understanding of our fauna, which at present is very poorly understood when compared with that of the British Isles for instance. It is to be hoped, therefore, that the number of professional Ornithologists and scientifically inclined amateur birdwatchers increases and these persons are given more encouragement, guidance and opportunities for research on the Avifauna of the country.

My observation on the reduction in the numbers of migratory water-birds to southern India during the 1969-70 winter season was supported by a similar observation by Mr. Neelakantan which prompted Mr. Serrao to pen his most informative article on this subject [Newsletter 10(9): 7-8.]. He quotes Vidal's suggestion that owing to large tracts in the north Indian plains being inundated with huge sheets of water due to exceptionally heavy rains in the preceding monsoon season, migratory waders, shorebirds and waterfowl presumably found it unnecessary to continue their southward migration to southern India in their usual numbers. This suggestion is in complete agreement with Mr. Neelakantan's and my observations last winter.

But Vidal also observed that in the case of certain migratory birds not influenced by the presence and extent of inland waters, the reverse was the case. i.e. Ring Doves, migratory Warblers and Rosy Pastors were in greater numbers while the water birds were poorly represented in such seasons of heavy rainfall mentioned above. This is another interesting aspect of such abnormal seasons which could be profitably pursued. In my case, I cannot say that last winter I noticed any increase in the numbers of migratory birds not attached to inland waters, such as Warblers, Flycatchers, cuckoos, falcons, etc., but it should be interesting to know from Mr. Neelakantan or any other birdwatcher from the south if he did observe such a thing.

THE TENTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Xth Annual General Meeting of the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India was held on Saturday, 23rd January, 1971 at the residence of the Editor. Approximately 20 persons were present.

1) Dr. Salim Ali was elected Chairman of the Meeting.

Before going on with the agenda, he referred to the sad death of Mrs Usha Ganguli who was one of the Editors of the Newsletter, and had played such a constructive role in the past many years. Dr. Salim Ali said that she was according to him one of the finest field ornithologists in India. There were many people, he said, who were able to identify birds in the field correctly, but few were so well briefed with the separate identification points of each bird and in a position to point these out on the spur of the moment.

2) The Honorary Secretary gave a report on the functioning of the Club, and said that the Newsletter was being sent but to approximately 250 persons of which 145 had paid subscriptions. Out of

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

13

the subscribers 13 were students who paid a subscription at a concessional rate of Rs.5/- only. However, taking every thing into account the financial position of the Club was less unsatisfactory than in the previous years, for the total receipts from January and December 1970 amounted to Rs.1,460.99 and the total expenditure was Rs.1,809.19 leaving a deficit of Rs.348.20.

As usual the Dynacraft Machine Co. Pvt. Ltd. had absorbed most of the printing and postage expenditure and in the current account of the Club there was a sum of Rs.1,850.95. Some printing bills of the past were outstanding and these would be paid from this amount.

3) The Honorary Secretary read out a letter from Mr. K.D. Ghorpade and one from Dr. Chottubhai Sutar in which they had made various suggestions for the Newsletter and for the activities of the Club. There was a general request for continuing with the Series "The Bird of the Month", and Mr. S.V. Nilakanta agreed to gear himself to this again.

Members also felt that it was essential to have regular field trips, and it was decided that Shri S.A. Hussain should be appointed Field Secretary. An attempt should be made through the State Transport and other organisations to let us have a bus for these field outings at a reasonable charge.

4) The following persons were duly proposed and elected on the Editorial Board of the Newsletter.

Dr. Salim Ali, F.N.I.,
46, Pali Hill,
Bandra, Bombay 50.

Mrs Jamal Ara,
North Office Para,
Doranda, Hinoo P.O.,
Ranchi; Bihar.

Dr. Biswamoy Biswas,
Indian Museum,
Zoological Survey of India,
Calcutta - 13.

Kunvar Shri Lavkumar,
Rajkumar College,
Rajkot.

Prof. K.K. Neelakantan,
Govt. Victoria College,
Palghat - 1, Kerala.

Mr. B.R. Grubh,
Bombay Natural History Society,
Bombay.

Mr. R.L. Fleming, Junior,
Kathmandu,
Nepal.

Mr. D.A. Stairmand,
Mercantile Bank Ltd.,
Bombay.

Brother A Navarro,
St. Xavier's High School,
Bombay - 1.

5) Mr. Zafar Futehally and Mrs L. Neelakanta were duly proposed and elected Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer of the Club.

The meeting concluded with a vote of thanks to the Chairman, Dr. Salim Ali and also to the hostess of the evening Mrs Laseeq Futehally.

NOTES AND COMMENTS.

At the Tenth Annual General Meeting (at which incidentally no one commented that the Newsletter had survived for a decade in this precarious world) some changes were made in the Editorial Board. Mr. S.V. Nilakanta and R.K. Sethna were dropped merely to allow the induction of fresh blood and is no reflection on persons deposed or to the valuable contribution which they made to the Club. The Editor apologises to Messrs Fleming, Stairmand, and Navarro for including their names in the Editorial Board without getting their previous written consent. There have been legitimate complaints about the poor cyclostyling and editing. Readers can help greatly by typing their manuscript (double spaced) and including wherever appropriate the Latin names of the birds. Members are requested again to send in extracts and precis of the various articles they read in various ornithological magazines. This section can be a valuable addition to the Newsletter and several members who do not get an opportunity to go out into the field could yet play an important part in supplying us with material.

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

15

The Editor would be failing in his duty if he did not pay a special tribute to J.S. Serrao for typing and editorial assistance.

We are still "coverless", and this is perhaps because of the postal strike in England. We are sure that Stewart Melliush has by now completed the line drawings on which he has been working.

In a recent talk in Bombay Sir Hugh F.I. Elliott, speaking on the "Ecological Basis of Conservation", referred to the tenacity of birds and vegetation and their capacity to survive in hostile urban environments. The Editor went out for a birding with Sir Hugh on the 26th January and saw a delightful congregation of birds at Mahim Creek, almost under a railway bridge over which there was continuous traffic. The morning's list included Black-winged Stilts, Blacktailed Godwits, Redhanks, Spotted Sandpipers, Indian Stints, Desert Wheatear, Blackheaded Gulls, Gullbilled Terns. All these were seen in a very small area of the creek during a brief twenty minute period. What an attractive Bird Sanctuary could be made in the area, if our Government would apply its mind to it. Will any of our readers take up this cause? It must be done before the "development" of the area is taken in hand.

Will all members please send in their subscription for the period ending 31-12-1971? Cheques to be made in the name of 'Zafar Futehally'.

CORRESPONDENCE

Redstart

I was very glad to find an article on the Redstart by D.A. Stairmand in the December Newsletter, as for the first time, a Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochrurus*) has come to our garden. On October 24th I heard a new call, and again on the 25th, and saw the bird - a male Redstart. I have not heard this call since, though the bird is still around. In winter, according to Whistler "the call then is a curious little croak". I have not heard this. For about two weeks the Redstarts regular beat was round the house outside our bedroom so I was able to study him frequently and at close quarters. Al-

though it was early in the winter, there was very little grey about him. On November 18th I saw him on the drive. I stood absolutely still and watched through binoculars at close range for about 5 minutes. During this time on four different occasions he flew up about 3 or 4 feet to capture insects returning to the ground immediately after. The rest of the time he shivered his tail, hopped about, and did "knee bends". I was not able to discover the cause of the knee bends. On December 14th I saw him on the ground under a myrtle bush almost next the wall of the house.

I frequently look out of the window at odd times of day, in the hopes of seeing something of interest, and at 2 p.m. on December 28th I was rewarded with "an eyefull". Within an area of not more than five square yards there was a hoopoe (not very common here), 15 to 20 sparrows, 1 male Redstart resplendent in his bright chestnut and black plumage, 3 Bluelegged Bustard Quail (*Turnix suscitator*), and a male Koel, his beady red eye and blue black plumage gleaming in the afternoon sun. The sparrows, Quail and Koel are permanent residents in this garden.

In the same issue of the Newsletter I was interested to see Mr. Gauntlett's letter referring to my article sent from Coonoor, and his agreement that birds are frequently found at much higher elevations than are mentioned in the books. I am very glad that he has confirmed that the sunbirds I saw must have been Loten's. I am not sure how high Kodaikanal is, but I have seen the Purple Sunbird a few times in garden in Coonoor, at a height of about 6,000 ft.

I am glad that Mr. Gauntlett has been able to identify the warbler as a Greenish, or Dull Green Leaf Warbler. I now hope he will be able to solve This warbler problem! I quote from my notes: On October 25th saw and heard for the first time some kind of warbler or flycatcher. Two of them, sparrow size or smaller, olivaceous brown above with perhaps a faint yellowish tinge, buffy white below, round head brownish greyish, black or very dark eyes, bill yellowish, legs greyish, dirty white eyebrow, and a possible very faint dirty white wing bar. Very quick jerky movements flitting restlessly in creepers on house and nearby shrubs. Saw them as close as it was possible through binoculars but very difficult to describe accurately, hence the number of "ishes" on the descriptive words! IF ONLY they would stay still for even a few seconds! The two, a pair?, were calling alternately to each other from a yard or two apart a very pretty little song, quite loud, something like 'pee-pee-pera, pee-pee-per', full speed ahead and almost continuously. I have seen and heard them several times since then, and on one occasion I recorded their song, which I hope will help in identi-

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

17

fying them. I hear that Mr. Gauntlett is quite an expert at recording bird calls, and as I find he lives less than 50 miles away, I am hoping to meet him and get his advice on tap-recording, as mine is still very much in the experimental stage.

Inspite of all the trouble in Bengal, I am glad to find the birds are still with us, and we are still hping to see you here one day!

With our best wishes for the New Year,

Mrs Sarah Jameson
Sanctoria,
Disergarh P.O.,
Dist. Burdwan, W.B.

Out on the Prowl again

I was confined to my flat, due to a minor illness, for two weeks from just before Christmas until this morning (6/i) when I was allowed out of captivity for a short spell.

A little before sunrise I took a taxi upto the public gardens on Malabar Hill, Bombay, and although the area these days is becoming more and more surrounded by flats, and many people were in the gardens taking their morning constitutional walk, it was marvellous to be out on the prowl again.

Roseringed Parakeets, House and a few Jungle Crows, Palm Swifts and Pariah Kites were the birds to immediately attract my attention and I welcomed the call of a Koel. At least this bird does provide some sort of a check on the crow overpopulation. Walking along the extreme west side of the gardens I soon had the delightful experience of watching a part of about ten White-eyes and several Purplerumped Sunbirds. These birds were down below me and made an absolutely beautiful picture as they flew around or clung acrobatically on poinsettia, roses, red and yellow canna, and scarlet bourgainvillea in tubs. The White-eyes and sunbirds did not always appear to get on too well, but perhaps this was merely high spirits, and occasionally these birds co-existed peacefully together on the same plant. There were obviously plenty of insects to be had for the birds were around the same plants for over twenty minutes and presented a particularly delightful spectacle against the brilliant bracts of the poinsettia and bourgainvillea. One sunbird had a very liquid bath on the dew on bourgainvillea bracts and several of the White-eyes appeared to have white on the crowns of their heads; possibly this appearance was caused by the morning dew or pollen from the flowers with which they came into contact. The White-

eyes and sunbirds visited the flower sprays of a Royal Palm and then settled in a pleasant leafy tree to preen and sun themselves. A Tailor Bird also visited the Royal Palm for insects. I was delighted with all this as, over the past two years, I have seen little of White-eyes. I am much better at spotting Ioras which, apparently contrary to other readers' experiences, I have little difficulty in seeing most week-ends. I moved on from this spot and noted the lovely ixora which also attracts sunbirds and managed to see a male Koel in a large tree next to a big Peepal, but the secretive female Koel eluded me. The peepal had some ripe figs and a small party of Copper-smiths were there with their stockiness and bright colouration and even a few calls. It was now one hour after sunrise and a Green Bee-eater had risen and was voicing its pleasant trilly tree-tree-tree and making graceful sallies after insects. I had missed the usual pair of Whitespotted Fantail Flycatchers in and around their favourite Asoka but I did see, and hear the tinkling song, of these charming lively birds in a flowering mango on my way down through the gardens to Babulnath Road and this made a fitting end to a very pleasant hour or so to be had even in a big crowded city in 1971.

D.A. Stairmand
Bombay.

Trema orientalis

In the article entitled "Birds in a Bengal Garden" by Shri F.M. Gauntlet published in the Newsletter Vol.10 No.10 of October 1970, the author has referred to a "Cherry" tree on which he observed many birds flocking. From the description of the said tree as given by Shri Gauntlet, the "Cherry" tree referred to appears to be Trema orientalis species, which he may verify.

The Trema orientalis is a small fast growing tree. Its bark is thin. The leaves are alternate, ovate or ovate-oblong, acuminate crenate serrulate, scabrid above, soft-tomentose beneath, base 3-7 nerved. The fruit is a drupe. It has horizontal branches.

I have observed many birds flocking on this tree for its flowers and fruits; which included Parrakeets, Bulbuls, Orioles, Ioras, Sunbirds, Flowerpeckers, Flycatchers, Chloropsis, and Lorikeets. When there are no birds on other trees, one is sure to trace some birds on this species. The birds seem to be attracted by this tree, which fact should give it a place in the birdwatchers garden. Likewise a Eucalyptus tree with its evergreen nature and profuse nectar-bearing inflorescence attracts all the nearby arboreal birds.

S.G.Neginhal

EDITORIAL BOARD:

Dr. Salim Ali
Bombay

Mrs Jamal Ara
Ranchi

Dr. Biswamoy Biswas,
Calcutta

Kunvar Shri Lavkumar
Rajkot

Prof. K.K. Neelakantan
Trivandrum.

Mr. B.R. Grubh,
Bombay

Mr. R.L. Fleming, Junior
Kathmandu, Nepal.

Mr. D. A. Stairmand,
Bombay

Br. A. Navarro
Bombay.

Editor:

Mr. Zafar Futehally,
Juhu Lane, Andheri,
Bombay - 58 AS.

Annual Subscription Rs.10/-.

Students Rs.5/-.

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

VOL XI NO 3 MARCH 1971



NEWSLETTER FOR
BIRDPATCHERS

Volume 11, Number 3

March 1971

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| An exciting day near Bombay, by O. M. Ashford | 1 |
| The Indian Courser, by D. A. Stairmand | 4 |
| A field key for the genus <u>Phylloscopus</u> , by F. M. Gauntlett | 5 |
| Does a leafing peepal attract insectivorous birds, by B. A. Palkhiwalla | |
| Review: Guide to the Bird Gallery - Madras Govt. Museum | 9 |
| Notes & Comments | 10 |
| Correspondence | 11 |
| Nesting colony of Pelicans in Andhra Pradesh, from Brig. R. Lokaranjan | |
| 'Birds in a Bengal Garden', from Ann Talbot Smith | |
| Rufousbacked Shrike (<u>Lanius schach</u>), from B. A. Palkhiwalla | |

AN EXCITING DAY NEAR BOMBAY

O. M. Ashford

This note is the result of a promise given to the Editor of the Newsletter after a fascinating day's birdwatching with him, Mr S. V. Nilakanta and Mr Kannan (part of the time). If I had suspected that I would ever be so rash as to agree to write an account of such a day, I would of course have made some fairly extensive notes at the time; as it is, two weeks after the event, I must rely entirely on my memory, a list of the birds we identified easily and some field notes on the ones which caused difficulty.

The area we covered on this memorable day, 7 February 1971, was from Vihar Lake up to the Kanheri Caves. At about 7.30 a.m. we were hoping to have some really good views of the Red Spurfowl (Galloperdix spadicea) before they took cover for the day. Mr Kannan proved to be right when he said that we had arrived about half an hour too late, for all I saw of this species was a rapid glimpse of a pair flying up about 10 yards ahead of me and disappearing rapidly into the thick undergrowth. There were however to be many compensations. The first was a Malabar Grey Hornbill (Tockus griseus) which obligingly stood on a branch long enough for us to confirm that it lacked the casque of the somewhat similar Tockus birostris. Thank you!

By now we were climbing up a dry ditch constructed to lead flood waters into Tulsi Lake. Green Barbets (Megalaima zeylanica) were calling all around but only rarely did we catch a glimpse of one. I was impressed by the variety of Drongos: in addition to the usual Black Drongo (Dicrurus adsimilis) I saw the Ashy Drongo (D. leucophaeus), the rarer Whitebellied Drongo (D. caerulescens) with its very musical song, and last (but not least!) the large Racket-tailed Drongo (D. paradiseus) with its incredible tail which miraculously does not seem to impede it in any way.

As we approached the top of the ditch I caught a glimpse of bright green in a silk cotton tree and was delighted to find that it was a Goldfronted Chloropses (Chloropsis aurifrons) catching the rays of the early morning sunshine. I carefully observed the golden forehead which so readily distinguishes it from Jerdon's Chloropses (Chloropsis cochinchinensis jerdoni), seen only a few days earlier in Trivandrum with Professor K. K. Neelakantan. For me, the other most exciting bird seen from the ditch was a Heart-spotted Woodpecker (Hemicircus canente) with its immense black crest contrasting with its stunted tail.

We spent the next few hours on the shore of Vihar Lake where there is apparently always in winter a good variety of visiting waders, duck, wagtails, etc., in addition to a large number of resident species. We caught a glimpse of a large duck with a blue-green iridescence on the wings as it flew over the lake. It 'landed' on the water too far away for easy identification but we suspected that it was a Comb Duck (Sarkidiornis melanotus), which my hosts informed me was rare* in this area. Fortunately we saw the same bird at much closer quarters later in the day and were able to confirm its identity and even to take its photograph. As we were sitting down to have a rest in the shade (by this time it was after midday), a large bird of prey with conspicuous white head and underparts flew very close above our heads; it was a Whitebellied Sea Eagle (Haliaeetus leucogaster), always a thrilling spectacle.

On our way along the road towards the Kanheri Caves in the early afternoon we stopped by a small puddle of water which I was told was a good place for flycatchers. Sure enough, within a few minutes we were watching a rather dull blue-and-brown flycatcher sitting on a branch of a tree before flitting down to have a drink; it was probably

*Apparently only record for Salsette Island. Two other records traceable for Bombay neighbourhood are: a solitary young collected by Inverarity at Penn, on 28.xi.1887, and another shot at Kihim (both places in Kolaba dist.) in May in 1930s. -- Ed.

a female Blacknaped Blue Flycatcher (Monarcha azurea). It was followed by a female Paradise Flycatcher (Terpsiphone paradisi), surely a beautiful bird in its own right with its chestnut upperparts dominated by a black crest, but completely outshone by the male which appeared a few minutes later displaying his silvery white tail streamers. Earlier we had seen several Tickell's Blue Flycatchers (Muscicapa tickelliae) with their distinctive rusty breasts.

Instead of going right up to the Kanheri Caves, which we could see through our field glasses thronged with large numbers of Homo sapiens, we struck off to the left up a narrow path and were soon far away from the transistorized homing calls of our fellow men. I spotted what at first sight I took to be a nuthatch but a closer examination quickly revealed the barred dark brown-and-white upper pattern of the Browncrowned Pygmy Woodpecker* (Picoides nanus). We also saw a thrush which I have not yet been able to identify from my field notes (Brown. Broad pale superciliary stripe. Russet flush on sides of breast. Rest of lower parts off-white); the nearest I can get to it is the Eye-browed Thrush (Turdus obscurus)**, which breeds in Siberia but apparently does not winter so far west as Bombay. Any suggestions?

By the end of the afternoon we had accumulated a list of nearly 80 species - in these notes I have of course only mentioned a few which were of particular interest to me and which have thus retained the most prominent place in my memory.

I returned to the same area on the morning of 9 February and added another 10 species to the list. Just as I was about to return to Bombay I noticed a kite flying low overhead. I had plenty of time to pick it up in my binoculars and to see the rich rusty underparts, the deeply forked rufous tail and the large white underwing patches which are diagnostic of the Red Kite (Milvus milvus). According to Volume 4 of the Handbook of Birds of India and Pakistan this species is a vagrant or an irregular visitor in this part of India. I have complete confidence in this observation as I have had many opportunities to compare the Red Kite with the Black Kite (Milvus migrans) in Switzerland. Perhaps the Red Kite sometimes escapes notice in India because of its similarity at first glance to this very common relative?

*Three different individuals of this woodpecker were seen by J. S. Serrao and Humayun Abdulali on 21 June 1970 in the Tulsi environs. -- Ed.

**There is only one record of Turdus obscurus from the Peninsula -- specimen secured by Capt. E. A. Butler in Belgaum in April (1881). Perhaps the bird seen by Mr Ashford could be the commoner Turdus unicolor. -- Ed.

THE INDIAN COURSER

D. A. Stairmand

In the middle of October I was just off the Nasik Road some 20 miles north of Poona in an area of sparsely grassed, stony wasteland with cultivation below me in the distance. I was well pleased with the morning's birdwatching and decided to sit on the ground in the shade of a track-side Banyan and casually watch the pipits and various members of the 'lark' family (*Alaudidae*) which were so numerous and tame. So tame in fact that I could watch them well without the use of binoculars. I had been sitting there at rest and in complete harmony with the world for only five minutes when I noticed with my naked eyes a bird about 60 yards away in front of rocks, which looked something like a 'partridge'. When I took up my binoculars I immediately saw it was not a 'partridge' but an Indian Courser (*Cursorius coromandelicus*) and there were, in fact, a party of five of these very attractive birds strung out in an uneven line over a distance of about 25 yards. This party of birds looked delightful with their rich rufous crowns, conspicuous double black and white stripes through and above the eyes, white chins, general coloration of sandy and grey-brown, long china-white legs and slender, curved and pointed bills. The Indian Courser is only ten inches in length but these birds gave me the impression (and it was only that) of being larger as they ran around very fluently on their three forward pointing toes dipping forward obliquely, in plover style, every now and again to pick up some insect. At first they often stretched up their necks and looked at me but as this party of Indian Coursers grew accustomed to my presence they became much tamer and occasionally a bird was within forty yards of me running quickly and dipping down to the ground for food. The party also became much more close-knit. Once two birds presumably went after the same insect as one bird raised its wings vertically high over the level of its body in a threatening attitude and caused the other to move away. During the half-hour that I watched these birds two people walked behind me on the track and a noisy lorry clattered past. The passers-by did not notice these birds, but on both these intrusions at least two of the Indian Coursers raised their wings high over their bodies - in an attitude sometimes shown in books to illustrate the Pratincole -- in the direction of the intruders.

When this party of birds decided to move on they passed quite close to me down a slope and out of sight. They had

provided me with such an enchanting half-hour that I easily resisted any temptation to pursue them.

A FIELD KEY FOR THE GENUS PHYLLOSCOPUS

F. M. Gauntlett

This large group of small, closely similar leaf warblers has been a great problem to all ornithologists, particularly those in India where 21 members of the genus occur.

K. Williamson, now Migration Research Officer for the British Trust for Ornithology and one time warden of Fair Isle Bird Observatory has produced on behalf of the BTO the solution to this problem in the form of Identification for Ringers - 2. The genus Phylloscopus. As its title suggests, it is intended primarily for identification of the bird in hand, but I have also found it invaluable as a field guide. From it, and with all due acknowledgement to Mr Williamson and the BTO, I have devised my own field key which differs in certain aspects from his which included measurements. It may be noted that Identification covers all the palaearctic members but my key is confined to those species found in India.

The basis of the key is to ascertain whether the bird is of the green/yellow or brown/white type, how many wing-bars it has and what sort of head pattern. This method has enabled me to identify 15 species in the field with a high degree of probability.

THE KEY

A Green above, yellow or yellowish white below

A1 Strongly marked head pattern, 2 wing-bars and yellow rump

1 P. pulcher, Orangebarred Leaf Warbler

2 orange wing-bars, yellow crown stripe, dark coronary bands and yellow supercilium. Outer 3 tail feathers largely white. Confined to the Himalayas.

2 P. maculipennis, Greyfaced, or Ashythroated, Leaf Warbler

2 yellow wing-bars, whole head including chin and throat grey. Whitish crown stripe and dark coronary bands. Himalayas, common around Darjeeling. Similar to some flycatcher-warblers, Seicercus sp., but 2 wing-bars distinctive.

3 P. proregulus, Pallas's Leaf Warbler

2 white wing-bars, yellow crown stripe, coronary bands less well marked, long yellow supercilium. Very small size, flutters like a Goldcrest to pick insects off leaves. Himalayas over 8000 ft, fairly common in Kashmir.

4 P. subviridis, Brooks's Leaf Warbler

Crown stripe and coronary bands less well marked, yellow rump indistinct, long golden yellow supercilia meet on forehead. Cheeks yellow. Confusion possible with strongly marked examples of Yellowbrowed Warbler. Northern W. Pakistan and Gilgit. Winter visitor to NW. India.

A2 Well-marked head pattern of crown stripe, coronary bands and conspicuous supercilium. 2 wing-bars

1 P. occipitalis, Western Crowned, or Large Crowned, Leaf Warbler

Upperparts yellowish green, underparts white with some yellow. Pale crown stripe of constant width. Has habit of waving one wing. Western Himalayas, common in Kashmir, widespread winter visitor.

2 P. reguloides, Blyth's Crowned Leaf Warbler

Upperparts olive-green. Pale crown stripe broadens into a spot on the nape. Apparently also has habit of waving one wing. Himalayas. These two not very readily distinguishable.

3 P. cantator, Yellowfaced, or Blackbrowed, Leaf Warbler

Yellow crown stripe meets yellow supercilium on forehead. Coronary bands black. Chin, throat and breast yellow, rest of underparts white. Eastern Himalayas.

A3 Head pattern confined to supercilium and dark line through eye. 2 wing-bars

1 P. inornatus, Yellowbrowed Leaf Warbler

Dull olive above, white below, 2 whitish wing-bars, long creamy supercilium. Rather small. Himalayas in summer, widespread plains winter visitor, usually gregarious. May sometimes have faint crown stripe.

A4 Head pattern as in A3. 1 wing-bar only

1 P. trochiloides, Greenish, or Dull Green, Leaf Warbler

Dull greyish olive above, dingy white below. Long thin supercilium. Common winter visitor, usually solitary

2 P. borealis, Arctic Warbler

Very similar to Greenish but slightly brighter coloured. Legs pale flesh instead of dark bluish grey. Rare vagrant.

3 P. magnirostris, Largebilled Leaf Warbler

Large and dark. Upperparts, particularly crown, and line through eye dark olive. Himalayas and plains winter visitor.

4 P. nitidus, Bright Green Leaf Warbler

Bright green above, mostly yellow below. Supercilium, cheeks and wing-bar yellow. Winter visitor, mainly to W. Pakistan and western India. May sometimes show slight second wing-bar

A5 Head pattern as in A2. 1 wing-bar only

1 P. coronatus, Eastern Crowned Leaf Warbler

Similar to P. occipitalis with which it may be conspecific, but darker above. Crown stripe less distinct. Winter visitor to S. Assam.

A6 Supercilium only. No wing-bar

1 P. affinis, Tickell's Leaf Warbler

Supercilium and whole of underparts a deep intense yellow. In summer above tree-line. Plains winter visitor. Grant's Leaf Warbler, P. a. subaffinis is considered conspecific and is unlikely to be differentiated in the field

2 P. tytleri, Slenderbilled, or Tytler's Leaf Warbler

Dull olive above, yellowish white below. Long thin bill. Kashmir in summer, winter visitor to west side of Peninsula mainly. May sometimes show traces of a wing-bar

B Brown above, dingy white or yellowish below. Not readily subdivided as group A due to lack of distinguishing marks, but all have a supercilium

1 P. collybita, Chiffchaff

Brown or greyish brown above, with some olive on wing and tail edges. Supercilium and flanks buff. Legs usually dark. Plains winter visitor, usually solitary and arboreal. Confusion possible with Greenish in worn plumage which has lost its wing-bar through abrasion

- 2 P. sindianus, Mountain Chiffchaff
Rather greyer than Chiffchaff without any olive feather edges. Sometimes considered conspecific. Arid areas of W. Pakistan and NW. India in winter
- 3 P. trochilus, Willow Warbler
Grey-brown above, dull white below with greyish breast. Legs pale, usually. Best distinguished from Chiffchaff by voice. Rare visitor
- 4 P. fuscatus, Dusky Warbler
Brown above, dirty white to fulvous or buff below. Small but distinct rusty white supercilium. The brownest of the group. Winter visitor, usually gregarious in waterside scrub.
- 5 P. griseolus, Sulphurbellied, or Olivaceous, Leaf Warbler
Dark grey-brown above, dull yellow below with brighter patch on the belly. Supercilium orange-yellow in front of eye, pale yellow behind. Has a habit of perching crossways on tree trunks. Plains winter visitor in deciduous forest. High NW. Himalayas in summer
- 6 P. schwarzi, Radde's Warbler
Not officially recorded in India but winters in Burma and has been recorded as far away as Britain. I have seen one in Durgapur which agrees with the characters of this species.
Brown above. Conspicuous supercilium broad and bright yellow in front of eye, tapering behind and paler. Underparts buff, deepest around vent, separated from white throat by greyish breast band
- 7 P. fuligiventer, Smoky Leaf Warbler
Dark sooty brown above. Indistinct supercilium and underparts dusky yellow. High eastern Himalayas.
- 8 P. neglectus, Plain Leaf Warbler
Greyish brown above, buffish white below. Very small, Goldcrest sized, with short tail. Winter visitor to W. Pakistan, possibly also NW. India and Kashmir on passage. Breeds Baluchistan

There are at least two other species of small warblers which could be confused with phylloscopi and should be considered.

- 1 Hippolais caligata, Booted Warbler
Greyish above, white below. White supercilium and narrow eye ring. Bill longer and heavier than phylloscopi of same size, crown peaked and tail square

- 2 Acrocephalus dumetorum, Blyth's Reed Warbler
Brown above, white below. Larger and longer with a long rounded tail and long bill. Much less active than a Phylloscopus

The experts may criticise the Key for being over-simplified, which of course it is. It would be impossible to produce a workable field key to include all the variations between races, ages and seasons, but it has been based on the most likely and typical averages.

DOES A LEAFING PEEPAL TREE ATTRACT INSECTIVOROUS BIRDS?

B. A. Palkhiwalla

On my way to office, I pass by a big Peepal (Ficus religiosa) tree growing in the compound of X Division Police Office where large drums of illicit are stored before disposing off.

For the last one month, I have been observing a pair of Common Green Bee-eaters on the topmost branches of this tree. The tree is having new foliage. Normally, my attention would not have been drawn to these birds, but for their aerial sallies, which were visible from quite a distance. It is really a joy to watch them.

I would like to know, however, why they prefer this particular tree, though there are many trees nearby. Sometime back also, I had seen similar birds further up on a peepal tree.

Is it possible that the Peepal having new foliage is attracting more insects? It would be interesting to know the experience of other birdwatchers.

REVIEW

GUIDE TO THE BIRD GALLERY. By S. T. Satyamurti. pp. xii + 195 (24 x 15 cm). Madras Govt Museum, Madras 1970. Price Rs11.30

One pleasant and easy way of getting acquainted with birds is to see the specimens in the museum with descriptive handbook dealing with the species displayed. Dr Satyamurti has produced just such a book dealing with 400 species exhibited in the Madras Museum.

It is a pity that the book is so expensive and will therefore be beyond the reach of school and university students, who might have otherwise made use of it. Also the photographs of the stuffed birds indicate that the specimens have been very poorly mounted and some of the birds look rather grotesque. This however is something

which the author could not have helped, but it goes to show the great need for better taxidermists in this country.

Z.F.

NOTES & COMMENTS

Complaints are being rightly made by our subscribers in Bombay that for the whole of 1970 there had been no outings at all. The fact is that attempts were being made to hire a bus on reasonable terms so that the whole group of birdwatchers could visit places like Bassein, Karnala, etc. Unfortunately no suitable arrangements could be made.

Under the circumstances could members please assemble on their own on Sunday, 28 March 1971, at 7 a.m. at the Aarey Market. An attempt will be made to reserve the Forest Log Hut overlooking the Vihar Lake, so that those who want can spend the whole day in the Park. A notice of this reservation will be sent to the members as soon as confirmation is received from the Forest Department.

I have written before in the Newsletter and elsewhere about the interesting assortment of birds one sees in comparatively urban surroundings. During my recent stay in the Railway Hotel at Ranchi last month, I saw the following species:

Common Mynas and Pied mynas feed on the lawn close to each other and it was difficult to determine what their specific preferences were for food and habitat. From the bougainvillea bush the sharp tsch, tsch indicated the presence of a Blyth's Reed Warbler though I have given up trying to see this bird after many unsuccessful attempts. A Coppersmith looked absolutely splendid with its crimson forehead and throat patch. There were Redvented Bulbuls, House crows, House Sparrows, Roseringed Parakeets, Spotted as well as Little Brown Doves, Blue Rock Pigeon, Pariah Kite, and Common Swallow. The most alluring birds were the White-eyes probing into the bark and flowers of a Drumsticks (Moringa pterygosperma) tree. The Moringa of Bihar flower much more profusely than those of Bombay and the little birds had an unlimited supply of food. These White-eyes have a tremendous social bond among themselves for they moved invariably in little packs from tree to tree.

CORRESPONDENCE

Nesting colony of Pelicans in Andhra Pradesh

I wonder whether any subscribers ~~wkx~~ live in the vicinity of Tadepallegudem. This is because I noticed that the Department of Tourism is continuing to mention the Nesting Colony of Pelicans in the vicinity of Aredu and Kolamaru in Andhra Pradesh.

I happened to visit the area in January 1970, but found nothing at all to indicate that the Pelicans were nesting there during that period.

If there are any interested readers of your Newsletter who have information on the Pelicans in that region, I will be very grateful if this could be made known, preferably in the Newsletter itself, so that all the readers get to know. Even any recent visits which may have proved futile would be worth knowing about, and perhaps the Tourist Department kept informed of the position.

Brig. R. Lokaranjan
Hqr CE J&K Zone
c/o 56 APO

✓ Prof. K. K. Neelakantan who studied the pelicanries of Andhra Pradesh some years back may be able to throw some light on the Tadepallegudem nesting colony.

Before the year is out we hope to circulate a list of our members regionwise. -- Ed.✓

' Birds in a Bengal Garden '

Knowing it would be of interest to her, I passed on Vol. 10 of the 1970 October issue of the Newsletter to Lady McNeice when she came to Singapore for a short stay in October. On her reading F. M. Gauntlett's ' Birds in a Bengal Garden ' she immediately identified the Cherry which Mr Gauntlett described as a Muntingia, a specimen of which grew in the garden of their home in Kuala Lumpur when she and Loke Wan Tho were children. She asked me to look it up in E.J.H. Corner's Wayside Trees of Malaya. This I have at last got around to doing (I have been away and have desperately been trying to catch up since my return) and now enclose a photostat of the entry in the book which you might care to forward to Mr Gauntlett.

Ann Talbot Smith
Cathay Building
Singapore

[The Editor regrets the delay in dealing with this interesting communication. The photostat is being sent to Mr F. M. Gauntlett. - Ed.]

Rufousbacked Shrike (Lanius schach)

I used to see regularly near my tent at the Scout/Guide Jamboree held recently at the Aarey Milk Colony a Rufous-backed Shrike. It seemed to be least disturbed by the thousands of boys and girls who had invaded his usual hunting ground, and it was exciting to see it carry on with its usual work. It afforded me the opportunity of introducing it to such of the Scouts/Guides who showed an interest in the bird.

B. A. Palkhiwalla
785A, Dadar, Bombay 14

Zafar Futehally
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers
32A, Juhu Lane
Andheri, Bombay 58-AS

EDITORIAL BOARD :

Dr. Salim Ali,
Bombay.

Mrs. Jamal Ara,
Ranchi.

Dr. Biswamoy Biswas,
Calcutta.

Kunvar Shri Lavkumar,
Rajkot.

Prof. K. K. Neelakantan,
Trivandrum.

Mr. B. R. Grubh,
Bombay.

Mr. R. L. Fleming, Junior,
Kathmandu, Nepal.

Mr. D. A. Stairmand,
Bombay.

Br. A. Navarro,
Bombay.

Editor :

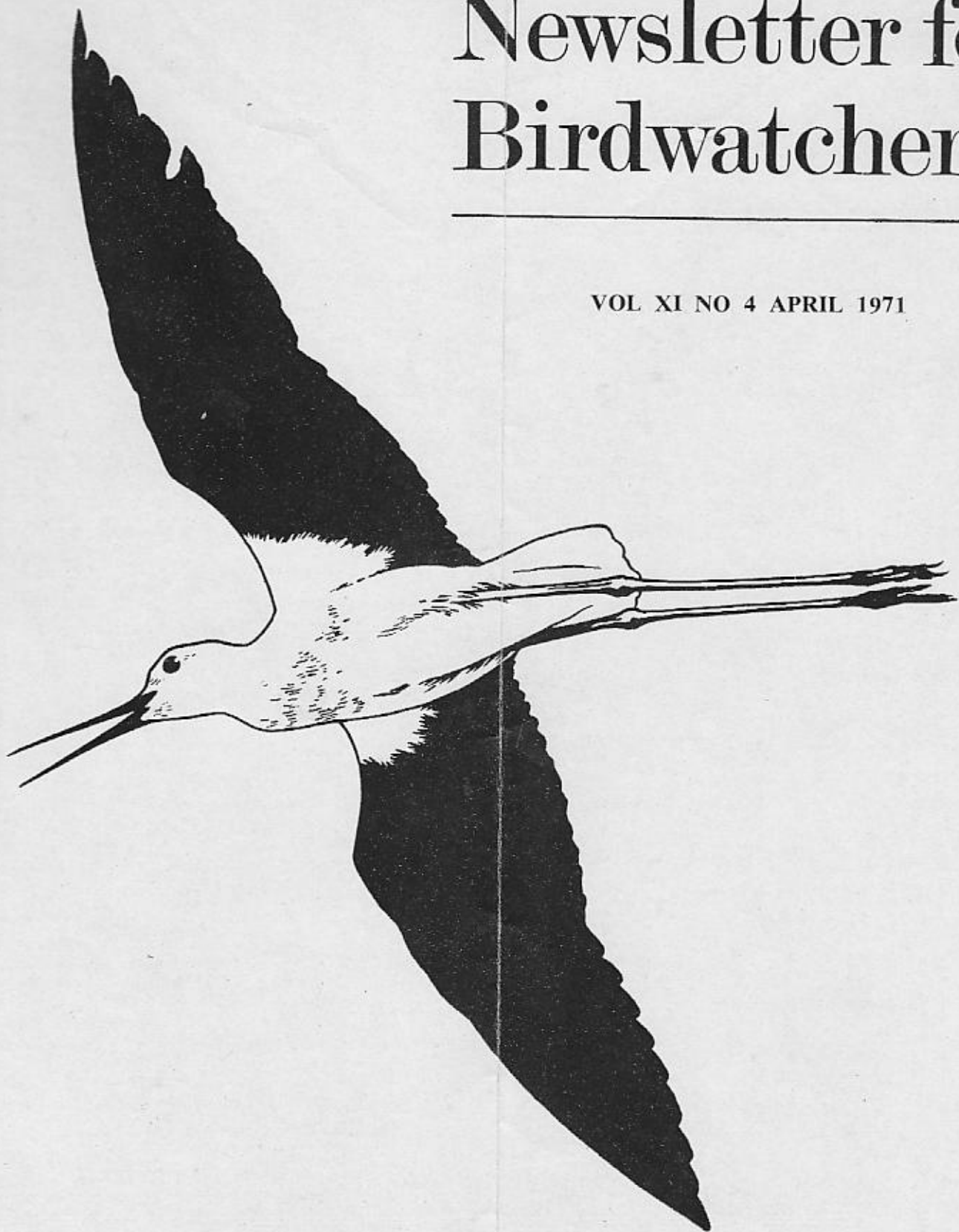
Mr. Zafar Futehally,
32A, Juhu Lane, Andheri,
Bombay-58 AS.

Annual Subscription Rs. 10/-.

Students Rs. 5/-.

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

VOL XI NO 4 APRIL 1971



NEWSLETTER FOR
BIRDBATCHERS

Volume 11, Number 4.

April 1971.

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|--------|
| The Pelicanry at Kolamuru by K.K. Neelakantan | 1 |
| An afternoon's Birding near Mysore City by D.A. Stairmand | 4 |
| Regional News: Gujarat by K.S. Lavkumar J. Khacher | 5 |
| Editorial Note | 6 |
| Correspondence: | |
| The Common Grey Hornbill in the Gir Forest from Robert B. Grubb | 6 |

THE PELICANRY AT KOLAMURU

K.K. Neelakantan

I am very happy to get an opportunity to write on this subject, for I believe that the Birdwatchers Field Club of India could bring some pressure to bear on the Government of Andhra Pradesh and make them give the pelicanry some effective protection. Before saying anything with regard to its present state, I must make it clear that the last time I saw it was in December, 1960.

The real question raised by Brig. Lokranjan's letter (NEWSLETTER Vol.XI, No.3) is - Do pelicans still nest in the area between the towns of Ganapavaram and Undi? He says that he 'found nothing at all to indicate that the pelicans were nesting there' in January, 1970. It is not clear whether he looked for pelicans in the air over the Aredu-Kolamuru region, or searched for their nests covering the whole area on foot. If he had looked for the birds and their nests from various points on the motor road, and, from their absence, concluded that there was no breeding colony, I would hazard a guess that the nests were all at some place to the west of the Ganapavaram-Undi road. When the breeding colony is at such a spot, birds seldom appear near the motor road. Asking the villagers also does not help, for many of them simply do not know. In December, 1960, when

2.

I first went to the places where there had been many nests in 1959-60, I was told by many villagers that the birds had not turned up for the 60-61 season. Some said that the birds had arrived and moved to unknown destinations far away. Yet there was a spectacular concentration of birds and nests hardly two miles away! That, however, was before the activities of the Virus Research team, Mr. E.P. Gee, and a unit of (presumably) the Films Division of the Union Ministry of Broadcasting & Information had made the villagers realise that the pelican was a Somebody.

From well before 1900 till 1961 the pelican had nested very regularly every year in this region, though not at the same spot. The temptation to console oneself with the thought that Brigadier Lokranjan had somehow been misled and that the birds must be nesting a little farther away from Aredu and Kolamuru is very strong. It will be a great pity if his conclusion is correct! But that possibility cannot be ruled out, for, in 1966, Sri P.S. Rao, Chief Conservator of Forests, Andhra Pradesh, wrote: "During this year the birds are reported not to have arrived." In the same letter he stated also, "... the Government of Andhra Pradesh was pleased to declare the pelican as a protected bird throughout the area within a radius of 20 miles around Kolleru Lake in September, 1963. Staff for the protection of the birds when they arrive in the usual season is also being sanctioned every year."

It is worth mentioning that this was the only letter I received from any Andhra Pradesh official that touched upon the fate of the pelicans and the pelicanry. The general attitude of those in authority is well revealed by the fact that the original copy of the 22 page typewritten report I had submitted to the Government in February 1961 ended up eventually in the office of the D.F.O., Eluru, who, on being asked for it in February 1966 by the Chief Conservator of Forests, replied: "As the booklet containing the notes of Prof. Sri. K.K. Neelakantan is misplaced in my office, I have addressed the Professor separately to send a copy of the same at an early date and it is awaited. The same will be submitted to the Chief Conservator of Forests soon on its receipt from the Professor." I was favoured with a copy of this letter with an endorsement on the back: "BY REGD. POST ACK.DUE. Copy to Sri Prof. K.K. Neelakantan, etc. with a request to please send a copy of report on pelicanry area at an early date as a report in this regard due to the Chief Conservator of Forests is held up." I had sent copies of the report to the Chief Conservator and the Deputy Secretary, Department of Agriculture, also in 1961.

Evidently these too had been "misplaced" or were not "forthcoming". Thinking that my refusal to type out another copy might make all the difference to the poor pelican, I prepared one and sent it. That, for all practical purposes, was the end of the affair.

Mr. J. Spillett who surveyed the Wild Life sanctuaries of Andhra Pradesh in 1966 (the year in which the pelicans were 'reported to have not arrived') was very noncommittal with regard to the pelicanry (see J.B.N.H.S. Vol.65, pp.1-16). Though he had the Deputy Chief Conservator himself for guide, he seems to have been quite unaware of the pelicanry's official status, if any; nor does he make it clear whether he visited the place and found birds breeding. If Mr. P.S. Rao was right, Mr. Spillett could not have found any breeding activity in November, 1966!

Shri B. Seshadri's statement in his THE TWILIGHT OF INDIA'S WILD LIFE (1969) that the Kolamuru pelicanry "is not a properly constituted sanctuary, but(the) Pelicans are fully protected by the villagers"(Unfortunately, this is not quite true. In 1960 there was plenty of evidence of the commercial exploitation of the pelicanry as there was a market for its eggs and flesh.) makes me suspect that staff for the protection of the birds is no longer being sanctioned.

Having learnt from past experience the utter futility of asking officialdom for information, may I suggest that the Editor should try to elicit information from the Chief Conservator of Andhra Pradesh on the present position, and give the gist of it in the NEWSLETTER? Perhaps a petition signed by all the members of the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India may help to jog the memory of the officials concerned and lead to a revival of the annual appointment of guards.

Apropos of this, I heard from a reliable source that at the pelicanry at Koondakulam (Tirunelveli Dist., Tamil Nadu) it is the practice of the State Wild Life Department to sanction a few temporary posts of guards or watchmen every year; and that this year (1970-71) the guards were appointed and then disbanded as the pelicans failed to nest there "due to inadequate rains". The plight of the wretched temporary guards is as precarious as that of the pelicans!

If the pelicans failed to nest at Kolamuru and Koondakulam this season, one would have expected some to go to Vedanthangal. But no pelicans nested at Vedanthangal this year. I visited this famous sanctuary on 17-1-1971 and was shocked to find the state it is in! But more about that later.

AN AFTERNOON'S BIRDWATCHING NEAR MYSORE CITY

D.A. Stairmand

About twelve miles outside Mysore City is the Krishna Raja Sagar Dam with the sacred River Cauvery, a Hotel (which was full) and the glorious Brindavan Gardens. I saw the gardens both in the afternoon and floodlit at night and I have never seen more beautiful gardens.

After seeing the gardens in the afternoon sun I wandered further on into the adjoining mango orchards and banana and coconut plantations of the Department of Horticulture. It was mid-January and the mangoes were in full flower and many Purplerumped Sunbirds were having a gay time around them. Passing under one mango I listened to the persistent calls of a pair of 'Redvented Bulbuls'. But sixth sense told me to investigate and I found that the birds were, in fact, a pair of Jerdon's Chloropsis. They were busy in the tree acrobatically taking insects but they also found time to imitate the calls of Purplerumped Sunbirds and Ioras. A little further on several Ioras were engaged in a squabble in a Neem and as I paused to watch this rather unusual spectacle I noticed that also in the Neem were Grey Tits and the quiet, unobtrusive Blackheaded Cuckroo-Shrike. I always seem to see Cuckoo-Shrikes purely by accident - they never bring themselves to my notice. An interesting sequel to the Iora squabble was a bird puffing itself out into a ball and parachuting down with accompanying whistling calls. But the bird was not in breeding plumage. Other birds seen on this little stroll were Redvented Bulbuls, Tailor Birds, Coppermiths, Indian Robins, Green Bee-eaters, Rufous-backed Shrikes, Blackbellied Finch Larks and many Redrumped Swallows over the canals in this area. Crossing the River Cauvery on the way back I noted Large Pied Wagtails, Little Cormorants and River Terns while in the far distance beyond the Brindavan Gardens and over the dam I noticed hundreds of birds which by their numbers I thought must be small gulls, although they looked wrong for 'gulls' even at that distance. So I set off for the bund of the dam and the birds turned out to be a party of ca. 400 Small Pratincoles, birds which I had never seen before. It was now about 15 minutes before sunset and swarms of midges were rising from the Cauvery over the dam and being snapped up by the Pratincoles. Not that the Pratincoles caught all the midges. My nose caught quite a number and others stuck on my arms like limpets. Some of the Pratincoles were very low in flight over my head and as they wheeled and glided I could hear their pleasant calls and the

snap of their bills closing on insects. This feast continued until 20 minutes after sunset when, of a sudden, the delightful Pratincoles vanished as if by magic.

REGIONAL NEWS: GUJARAT

K.S. Lavkumar J. Khacher

We have been very happy to receive the March issue of the Newsletter and would like to extend our congratulations to our Editor for the fine cover. Our local member and artist K.P. Jadav is planning a cover for the next year.

Though we have not increased in numbers, we are still a very viable group and those of us who have been interested in birds are very active and are going out regularly with the exception of the Regional Editor of course and what he fails to do by way of active bird-watching he makes up by periodically sending off articles and typed scripts to the Newsletter. However, we all are very keen and actively await our copies of the Newsletter.

Mr. Ashford's note on the Eye-browed Thrush Turdus obscurus is interesting and of special significance to us here because this winter our veteran birdwatcher Lalsinh Raul wrote from Porbandar with a description taken by him in the field of a strange bird which I could identify as this bird. I had asked him to write of the occurrence to the Newsletter and to the B.N.H.S. but he being rather shy of putting pen to paper has not done the needful. I have again written to him send his record to be published.

We must express our appreciation for the key prepared by Mr. Gauntlett on the Phylloscopus. I hope he will not be too annoyed if I in turn use his material to produce a still simpler key on what is certainly, with all the keys on Earth, a job for experienced bird-watchers. Talking of keys, some of our members here would like to have a reprint of my own key on swallows produced in the earlier issues of the Newsletter and I would request our Editor to please be good enough to have it reproduced.

Mr. Stairmand has indeed a capacity of transporting his readers to the spots where he spends time observing birds and we are all happy to read his notes which are coming at regular intervals. I believe he comes over to our part of

of the country in the course of his duties and he is requested to inform the Regional Editor in advance so that we all may entertain him.

Dr. Salim Ali has very kindly taken interest in the bird drawings by K.P. Jadav and he is now preparing a few plates for a book on the birds of the Delhi region written by late Mrs. U. Ganguli and being published by her husband Prof. B. Ganguli. This has been a great encouragement to our young artist and we all here are eagerly awaiting the book to see our friend in print.

EDITORIAL NOTE

The Editor regrets that owing to unavoidable circumstances and the illness of J.S. Serrao there has been delay in producing the Newsletter for April. We are making this into a short number to avoid further delay.

CORRESPONDENCE:

The Common Grey Hornbill in the Gir Forest

The Common Grey Hornbill (*Tockus birostris*) were once common in the Gir Forest, but have become completely extinct now. They were highly prized for their flesh and feathers which are believed by the local folk to be of great medicinal value especially for expectant mothers. I have been looking for them since I came here besides asking the maldharis and others living in the Gir. All have the same answer: that it has been wiped out. Mr. K.T.B. Hodd was recording all the birds during his stay here, but did not find this species.

Here is an example of a bird which apparently has become extinct not because of habitat destruction or any other ecological limiting factors but because of man. Therefore by reintroducing sufficient number of these birds in Gir it should be possible to reclaim this lost species in Saurashtra. Of course, it will be necessary to protect them once introduced.

Mr. Dharmakumarsinhji in his Birds of Saurashtra has the

following to say on this bird: "On account of the general belief that the feathers of these birds are of medicinal value, many are killed. The birds breeding in large trees were often destroyed in forest coupes..... Old forest men of the Gir say that once these birds were not uncommon and that they were seen regularly throughout the year and were plentiful during the winter months..... The last report of a bird was in 1950 in the Kunki block of the Gir Forest."

Robert Grubb
Gir Sanctuary
Sasan Gir.

Zafar Futehally
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers
32A, Juhu Lane,
Andheri West,
Bombay - 58 (AS).

EDITORIAL BOARD :

Dr. Salim Ali,
Bombay.

Mrs. Jamal Ara,
Ranchi.

Dr. Biswamoy Biswas,
Calcutta.

Kunvar Shri Lavkumar,
Rajkot.

Prof. K. K. Neelakantan,
Trivandrum.

Mr. B. R. Grubh,
Bombay.

Mr. R. L. Fleming, Junior,
Kathmandu, Nepal.

Mr. D. A. Stairmand,
Bombay.

Br. A. Navarro,
Bombay.

Editor :

Mr. Zafar Futehally,
32A, Juhu Lane, Andheri,
Bombay-58 AS.

Annual Subscription Rs. 10/-.

Students Rs. 5/-.

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

VOL XI NO 5 MAY 1971



NEWSLETTER FOR
BIRDPWATCHERS

Volume 11, No. 5

May 1971

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Screaming of peacock heard in the Himalayas, by Sohan Singh Saini | 1 |
| A puzzling bird: A new record?, by Ialsinh M. Raol | 2 |
| Birdwatching at Arnala Island, Bombay, by A. Navarro, S.J. | 3 |
| Tungabhadra reservoir birds, by S. G. Neginhal | 6 |
| Birds seen on two mornings in the Botanical Gardens, Ootacamund, by D. A. Stairmand | 8 |
| Notes and Comments | 10 |
| Correspondence | 11 |
| Winter visitors at Mahim Creek, from D. A. Stairmand | |
| Roosting flight, from B. A. Palkhiwalla | |

SCREAMING OF PEACOCK HEARD IN THE HIMALAYAS

Sohan Singh Saini

During my recent visit to a place named Shangarh in Sainj Valley of Kulu Himalayas, I was fascinated by the sight and songs of various birds. Among more common ones are the Yellowbilled Blue Magpie, Himalayan Tree-pie, Himalayan Nutcracker, Grey Tit, Black Tit, Whitethroated Laughing Thrush, Blackheaded Sibia, Whitecheeked Bulbul, Kashmir Dipper, Spotted Forktail, Paradise Flycatcher, Scarlet Minivet, Wagtail, Himalayan Woodpeckers, Hoopoes, Jungle Crows, Pheasants, Parakeets and Himalayan Snow Pigeons.

This village Shangarh is situated at an altitude of c. 8200 ft above m.s.l., on the left bank of Sainj river which merges with the Beas about 20 miles down west near Aut. The place have large beautiful grassy meadows all round and presents a charming sight in the evening when the sun throws its golden rays of diminishing light through the marvellous cedars and pines.

It was my first evening at this place that I came out disturbed confusingly by the screams kan-nn-onn resembling those of a peacock. All my initial efforts to find out the truth were fruitless but inquiries from the local people gave the clue that it was nothing by the peacock and I became curious to see this marvellous bird at such a heavenly place. I did not have to wait long as two peahens and one peacock emerged from the forest and entered the agricultural fields. It was only when the visibility became too poor to view these birds that I bade good night to them. After that I used to meet these friends every day.

From my immediate studies and inquiries made with the local people I gathered the following information:

i. There are no peacocks found down or up, the valley except in this particular area bounded by a ridge in the east and a small stream in the west, the main Sainj river in the north and fir forest in the south. The peacocks are seen wandering about up to 9000 ft above m.s.l.

ii. The total population of peahens is about 8 to 10 while that of peacocks is about 2 or 3. It was told that in 1966 one pair of peafowl migrated from somewhere to this place and has been multiplying since then.

iii. The local people do not kill this bird for eating.

Very recently I had been able to explore another locality a little away from Sainj valley, where I found peacocks. But this locality is not so much in the interior and peafowl are found only up to 6000 ft above m.s.l. Snowfall is almost negligible as compared to Sainj valley.

Nowhere else I have met peafowl at high up places, nor have I heard of any such incidence. This bird has not been recorded in the Indian Hill Birds by Dr Salim Ali. Even in his The Book of Indian Birds Dr Salim Ali has described the upper limit of this bird at 5000 ft above m.s.l.

In spite of my best efforts I could attribute no reason for this peculiar behaviour of this bird except that either this particular family was a great lover of charm and beauty of natural surroundings with least human disturbance or that it was driven by intense heat, to take abode here some time ago.

I request the readers to kindly throw some light on this behaviour of the bird.

A PUZZLING BIRD: A NEW RECORD?

Lalsinh M. Raol

On 30 October 1970 I went birdwatching at Sukala, a small lake some four miles NE. of Porbandar. There, I chanced to see a bird of about the same size as a myna flying away and disappearing on my approach. The impression of that first fleeting glance was that of a strange bird never seen before by me. After completing a check of the eastern side of the lake, I cautiously returned to the spot hoping to come across the stranger again. The bird was there moving about on the ground in a tangle of undergrowth of a babool thicket! It remained in the vegetation and shade hopping around picking up insects. From time to time it flew up into the lower branches of the trees above. It never gave me a good view in sunlight, but it certainly was not shy and I was able to watch it for several minutes before it flew off. I had field notes jotted down. The

first impression I had was that it resembled the Nilgiri Laughing Thrush as illustrated by Roland Green in Whistler, and on returning home I at once drew out the book and compared my field notes with the picture and the text. The tally was not full and so I had an enigma on my hands. I thus visited Sukala again on 1st November hoping to meet my new friend again. The bird was located in approximately the same place! It was hopping about on the ground in the underbrush picking up food as before. It was totally silent, I reproduce my field notes of the 1st here:

1.xi.1970: Sukala, Porbandar. 8.45 a.m. Size when seen beside a Common Myna, slightly smaller and slimmer. Hopping about on ground like a thrush. Bill yellowish; this particularly at base of lower mandible. Black line from bill to eye; white line above the eye; upperparts dark earthy brown; head and cheeks ashy; under tail-coverts white; a small white line from lower mandible to eye below the dark line; upper throat down to upper breast whitish; sides of head finely streaked with white; breast and flanks light brown; belly white; a faint white line on closed wing; legs flesh coloured.

On going through my bird books I just could not place this thrush and a birdwatcher become fidgety when baffled in this way. I therefore wrote off to our Regional Editor, K. S. Lavkumar and he identified the bird as Turdus obscurus.

I again visited Sukala on 8.xi.1970, 22.xi.70, 27.xii.70 and 4.ii.1971, but my friend had left. In the March 1971 issue of the Newsletter, Mr Ashford has a similar problem to mine from Bombay. Turdus obscurus v. T. unicolor. Why not the former?

BIRDWATCHING AT ARNALA ISLAND, BOMBAY

A. Navarro, S.J.

A birdwatching trip to Arnala Island on January 8, 1971 was rewarded by the location of a small colony of Sanderlings.

Arnala Island is situated less than a mile from the mainland and quite near the entrance to Vaitarna Creek. The size of the island is relatively small; it comprises Arnala Fort with its watch-tower and a small fishing village. As for the vegetation, it seems as if the island never had its own flora. Around the village, there are a few scattered palms and scanty vegetation with a few trees and bushes; most of the land that is not covered by high tide is cultivated, but only during the monsoon.

To go birdwatching on a small island like this one is

like gambling, since the nature of our observations is fully controlled by the influence of the tides; no one knows the surprises and disappointments one will gather at the end of a day's birdwatching. As a matter of fact as we stepped on the island we visualised that to make our birdwatching a success we would have a hard task to face for we never did dream that the ebb-tide would be so low that the water-line was more than half a mile distant from the centre of the island; besides, it was exceedingly difficult to move over boulders and stones heavily covered with barnacles and slippery moss, combined with aquatic plants proper to the winter season; we were lucky in that we carried a fine pair of binoculars through which we would screen the water-line and observe the varieties of waterbirds along shallow waters around the island. First, we had a grand sight of a long line of Gullbilled Terns (Gelochelidon nilotica) all the gulls were facing the same side - a manner of line formation peculiar to the terns and gulls; as they are landing, each individual places itself to the side of the first one, always facing the same direction. Behind the gulls there was a Grey Heron, Ardea cinerea standing like a sentinel; further on, on a long narrow rock, surrounded by shallow water, were small groups of Brownheaded Gulls (Larus brunnicephalus) with a few Yellowlegged Herring Gulls (Larus argentatus); now and then a few lonely Reef Herons (Egretta gularis) could be seen. These herons could be seen in two colour patterns: one pure white and the other a bluish white slate; most of them were wearing the dark pattern. we could locate only two or three Reef Herons with the white pattern. In the same way, around the island the Pond Herons (Ardeola grayii) could be seen in their static hunched position. As we bent around, facing the sea, there were a few Cormorants (Phalacrocorax niger) and a small group of Red- and Green-shanks. In the far distance, on isolated islets, we saw the Plovers flying in large numbers, performing their synchronised up and down movements with their unpredictable sudden turns, so typical of the plovers. Some groups were lost to sight in the hazy skyline as others were seen landing back on the islets from where they had come.

Around the island we noticed the presence of a few Gould's Desert Chats (Oenanthe deserti); the Collared Bush Chats (Saxicola torquata) were seen only in the small dry patches of dry fields, perching on sticks or small patches of grass - the remnants of the last crop.

On the parapet of the Fort there was a pair of Rock Thrushes (Monticola solitaria) and quite a good number of Rock Pigeons. Around the village the usual nucleus of birds that are always seen associated with the human element. The Common Sparrow (Passer domesticus), the Common House Crow (Corvus splendens), a few Jungle Crows (Corvus macrorhyn-

chos), the Common Myna (Acridotheres tristis). A single King Crow (Dicrurus adsimilis) was enjoying its usual free rides on the saddle of a small herd of buffaloes, laboriously attended by a small colony of Cattle Egrets (Bubulcus ibis), and on a few occasions we heard the calling of the Whitebreasted Kingfisher (Halcyon smyrnensis).

In the sky above there were a large number of Common Swallows (Hirundo rustica), and the Dusky Crag Martins (Hirundo concolor), together with a few Bee-eaters (Merops orientalis). The Common Kites were flying or resting on the palm trees; for a few minutes we had a glimpse of a Kestrel soaring into the sky; apparently it was not much interested in the island as it flew back to the mainland.

After lunch we ventured to explore the side of the island nearer the entrance of the Vaitarna Creek; here the terrain changes: there is a sand strip nearly half a mile long. Scattered all over the sand the Lesser and the Large Sand Plovers (Charadrius mongolus and C. leschenaulti), with a few Little Ring Plovers and Wagtails. I did not find it easy to ascertain their final identification. As we were nearer the very end of the sand strip we were rewarded with the sight of a small group (about 8-10) waders which from the manner of their feeding on the low-tide, surmised to be the Sanderlings. Just to clear my doubts, after much deliberation we decided to collect a single specimen in order to confirm their identity. In fact, they were the Sanderlings and I am inclined to point out that the watching of a group of Sanderlings on our sea shores is a very rare incident.

It is well known that the Sanderlings winter in Africa and in India; they also occur in the Laccadive and Maldive islands and they are considered regular visitors to the Indian sea coasts. Nevertheless the Sanderling is very poorly represented in our Indian collections, the Bombay Natural History Society having the largest number of specimens collected during the last half century.

The way to recognise the Sanderling can be taken from the description given by Salim Ali and S. Dillon Ripley's Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan where they describe the general habits as 'rumming swiftly in a blur of twinkling legs after each receding wave to pick up tit-bits it may cast on shore and hurriedly retreating before the coming next wave.' The Sanderlings have come to India in full winter plumage; the upperparts are whitish grey in colour and the underparts from chin to tail, pure white. It breeds in Spitzberge and the Arctic Coast; sometimes even ventures to penetrate into the Arctic Tundra around the North Pole.

As there are doubts whether the Sanderling can possibly stand the long, non-stop, trans-continental flights, we may assume that the migration route to the Indian sea shore

must be a long one. The most favourable route may be that from their summer grounds bordering along the sea shores of the Atlantic Ocean down to the south of Europe, through the Strait of Gibraltar into the Mediterranean Sea, entering the Red Sea and bordering the Saudi Arabian shores up to the Persian Gulf from where they follow the whole of the Indian sea shores. This is only an hypothesis; nevertheless since we doubt of the possibility of the Sanderling being able to cover the straight land route to the Indian sea shores and they have to follow a sea route, the migration flight will be around 11,000 miles.

The size of the Sanderling compares with that of the Common Sandpiper.

TUNGABHADRA RESERVOIR BIRDS

S. G. Neginhal

On the 10th and 11th February 1971, I had to camp at Shingtalur, a tiny village on the banks of the famous Tungbhadra river, in the Mundargi Taluka of Dharwar district, Mysore State. The readers may recollect that a big dam is built across the Tungabhadra river at Hospet (Munirabad), Mysore State, with the main purpose of irrigating the fields. All the same hydro-electricity is the by-product here. Shingtalur, is a little over 75 miles upstream from this dam. Up to Shingtalur the backwaters of the reservoir accumulate. Being situated at the last end of the reservoir the stagnated water of the river, at Shingtalur, is not deep. At places the water is knee-deep and at places shoulder-deep. One can cross this river at this place to the other side villages of Bellary district. Incidentally this river forms the border of Dharwar and Bellary districts. There are three big islands here, bearing tree-growth. The surrounding watershed areas bear the scrub forests of Acacia and Albizzia amara. The average rainfall of the tract is about 13 inches. The summer is very hot. The rainy season and the winter are quite pleasant. Here, there is a famous temple of Lord Veerabhadra. A small rest house is built overlooking the river, for the visiting pilgrims.

I reached Shingtalur on the evening of 10th February. I was extremely tired after walking 16 miles under the scorching sun in the surrounding scrub jungle (all the trees in deciduous condition, save the Ixora trees; most of the trees not more than my height!). On reaching the Rest House I lay down on the granite floor of the veranda to allow the cool stones to absorb my fatigue.

Just then, in front of me I saw 6-8 beautiful birds, light grey above and white below, flying forwards and backwards on the Tungabhadra river. Now and then they were diving down into the water obviously to catch some fish.

I forgot my fatigue and immediately went to the river bank. On closer look I observed that the birds had red bills and slightly forked tails. They had a black cap. Their bill and eye were intently directed below as they were scanning the water for prey. The most delightful scene was accorded when these birds dived and plunged into the still water of the river to catch fish. The calls uttered in flight were of three types. When they were on flight to catch their prey the call was a deep phow-phow. On their return upward flight after a successful catch, the call was a victorious and elongated phe-oh-phe-oh. If the diving was not rewarded, a painful note thiv-thivi-thiv-thivi was uttered. The foregoing details of the bird must have already revealed their identity - the Indian Whiskered Tern (Chlidonias hybrida). These birds are never tired of flying to and fro. They were found flying as late as the late dusk. Their silvery grey and white coloration, their to and fro flight, the dive and the plunge and their enchanting calls are unforgettable.

On the evening of 10th February I was startled to see two black coloured birds flying together with five snow-white Cattle Egrets (Bubulcus ibis) across the river. On close observation, when they flew low over my head, I was amazed to find the black birds to be nothing else but the black coloured Cattle Egrets! A Nature's freak!! On the 11th February, I again saw two white cattle egrets flying with one charcoal coloured cattle egret!! The black coloured cattle egrets were completely black as a crow. A rare sight!

As I was sitting on the river bank I saw a lonely Common Sandpiper (Tringa hypoleucos), greyish brown above and white below, walking along the river edge. It flew off across the river uttering a shrill tee-tee-tee, flying very low over the water and revealing its characteristic wing-bar.

A long wading Blackwinged Stilt (Himantopus himantopus) attracted my attention on the other side of the river bank. It had black wings. Its breast, stomach and all its underparts were pure white. The head had a black cap. The collar and the forehead was white. The black colour of the head covered both sides of the eyes as well, leaving the forehead white. When it noticed me, it flew off uttering 3-4 times peep-peep-peep - a frightened or rather a protesting note for intrusion. It had a long and slender beak, black in colour. The legs were lean and long, reddish in colour. I have seen different types of coloration of black and white on these birds - some having white heads. The presence of this Blackwinged Stilt made me to look out for the other wader, the Spotted Sandpipers (Tringa glareola) which I have always noticed wherever the former were found. Three or four of these little waders were immediately noti-

ced probing with their bills for food, often wagging their tails. On being disturbed they flew vertically into the air and off they went like a helicopter with a shrill note.

On the 11th February I crossed the river and went to one of the islands of this river. Here the Ring Dove (Streptopelia decaocto) and the Little Brown Dove (S. senegalensis) were plenty. The Common Peafowls (wild) were also commonly seen in herds. A pair of Ashy Wren-Warblers (Prinia socialis) were seen actively hopping in a shrub. The common Green Bee-eaters (Merops orientalis) were making much noise in a low-branched tree along the river. The Barheaded Geese (Anser indicus) were seen resting on sandbanks, in low water, in the middle of the river near an islet. Of course the Paddy Bird (Ardeola grayii) was there standing hunched up at the water's edge. A Common Kingfisher (Alcedo atthis) was perching on a low branch on the river bank. On my return to the Rest House I saw the Common Myna, the Indian Robin, the Black Drongo (Dicrurus adsimilis), the Common Quail (Coturnix coturnix), the Grey Partridge (Francolinus pondicerianus), the Painted Partridge (P. pictus), the Common Babbler (Turdoides caudatus), the Hoopoe, the Crow-Pheasant, the Roseringed Parakeet, and the Roller.

I made friendship with an educated Andhrite young, Shri Venkatpati Raju, who has taken up agriculture on modern lines. He is cultivating a great stretch of land on the banks of the Tungabhadra at this place. He has thoroughly studied all the birds here. I was surprised to find a powerful binocular and The Book of Indian Birds by Salim Ali with him. He told me that the other birds seen by him in this reservoir were the Brahminy Duck, the Common Teal, the Bluewinged Teal, the Pintail, the White Ibis, the Black Ibis, the Whitenecked Stork, the Blacknecked Stork, the Indian Moorhen, and the Flamingo.

As I was sitting on the river bank late at dusk, I saw a large number of crepuscular and nocturnal birds started coming to the river. I could not know which were these birds as I had no lights. A 6 volt or 12 volt battery fitted to a search light would be better suited to study these birds. I wish somebody would start writing something about these nocturnal birds.

BIRDS SEEN ON TWO MORNINGS IN THE BOTANICAL GARDENS, OOTACAMUND

D. A. Stairmand

The Botanical Gardens, which are situated at the edge of the town, consist of 55 acres and the elevation ranges from 7350 ft to 7710 ft. Temperatures were approximately 70°-40° and the days gloriously sunny. The gardens are beautifully maintained and contain plants, shrubs and many

magnificent trees a large number of which, as befits a botanical garden, originate from various foreign countries.

On two mornings, 16.i and 17.i, I recognised the following birds:

Small Green Barbet, Indian Pitta, Grey Drongo, Jungle Myna, House Crow, Jungle Crow, Redwhiskered Bulbul, Whitespotted Fantail Flycatcher, Willow Warbler, Southern Blackbird, Mountain Thrush, Blueheaded Rock Thrush, Pied Bushchat, Blue Chat, Magpie Robin, Grey Tit, Tree Pipit, Grey Wagtail, Purple Sunbird, Loten's Sunbird, White-eye, House Sparrow, Rosefinch.

It may be noticed that all except one of these birds are of the Order Passeriformes. Some of the birds were at an altitude higher than usually recorded for them, e.g. Indian Pitta, Magpie Robin.

Willow Warblers (probably Tickell's and Greenish), White-eyes and Grey Tits were common in these gardens and Small Green Barbets call their pucok pucok frequently. I was able to watch one calling from a branch and it was evident that the bird's throat got much violent exercise. The Whitespotted Fantail Flycatchers were even on the paths in the higher parts of the gardens dancing from side to side. Also high up were most of the Redwhiskered Buleuls - taking berries from bushes - and sunbirds. The Purple Sunbirds were in non-breeding dress and taking nectar in the approved manner for sunbirds. However, Loten's Sunbird was sallying forth after insects and returning to the same perch in the manner of a flycatcher. Rosefinches added further colour to these higher reaches and there was usually a Grey Wagtail gaily tripping around. The Wagtail's coloration seemed less good here than those seen at about 4000 ft and below. There were small parties of Tree Pipits but I was able to watch these only after I had disturbed them from the grass and they had flown up onto horizontal boughs perching there on full view pumping their tails slowly up and down. They are finely marked birds and very attractive despite their sober colours.

Pied Bushchats, with the males in song on exposed perches and females close by, and Grey Dronoes were well spread over the gardens while the crows, sparrows and Jungle Mynas were most numerous on the lawns near the entrance.

'Thrush Corner' was on the low level in a secluded spot with plenty of cover by way of trees and shrubs, a carpet of dead leaves, and a concealed ditch with a trickle of water. Here were the rather plentiful and bullying Southern Blackbirds (but they are fine songsters during their breeding season), a solitary Mountain Thrush, a male Blue Chat and the thrush-like Pitta. I saw a lot of the Blue Chat and the Pitta in their little area and was able to study them for long periods. I saw the Mountain Thrush only once

and then it was flicking over leaves in the ditch. This is a beautifully marked bird.

On the first morning I saw - very briefly - the female Blueheaded Rock Thrush not far from 'Thrush Corner' as she flew onto a branch of a tree. The second morning I disturbed the male as I walked along the mid-section of the gardens where the previous morning I had watched a pair of Magpie Robins. He flew onto a big bare horizontal bough and as he stayed there motionless I sat down on the grass and studied this lovely bird. He used three trees as his bases and, if I've copied the labels correctly, these were 'quercus suber, quercus cerris and araucaria rulei'. Horizontal boughs about 10 feet above the ground were favoured and the bird used these as his look-out posts for prey crawling on the grass. Every five minutes or so he flew to the ground and either disposed of the prey on the spot or, if more succulent, he took it back to the same or a nearby perch and - if it was large - put it on the topside of the bough before eating it. Grey Drongos - once three - tried to rob the thrush of his prey but totally without success. When perched the bird often had a hunchbacked appearance and the white in the wings was always noticeable. Probably he was holding his wings a little away from his body. To test the apparent tameness of this bird I, upon leaving, walked very close past him and had a glorious view as he didn't retreat.

These gardens are absolutely delightful and well repay a visit by any nature lover.

NOTES & COMMENTS

MATHERAN

A week's stay in Matheran (12 to 20 April) was most refreshing. Shamas and Whitethroated Ground Thrushes called from every direction, but the ventriloquistic attributes of the latter were most annoying. The high-pitched notes of the Thrush seem to come from one direction, and the low-pitched ones from another. Very often it took 20 minutes to locate a bird calling from within a radius of 50 yards. Then there were Ioras, Orioles, Barbets, Blacknaped Blue Flycatchers, Tickell's Blue Flycatchers and others. One evening in the valley below Echo Point we got splendid views of three falcons which from their brown and white colouring seemed to be the migrant race Falco peregrinus japonensis. The next day below Porcupine Point we saw a Shahin Falcons (Falco peregrinus peregrinator) which were much darker. On two occasions we saw a pair of Crested Serpent Eagles screaming and wheeling overhead.

11

The Bonnet Monkeys and the Langurs are doing very well. They have plenty to eat in the way of the Para Jambu fruits which are too bitter for humans - otherwise they would not be so well supplied. A talk with the Forest Officer, V. M. Kardekar revealed that panthers are still occasionally seen.

But like everywhere else in India, the erosion of the soil is consequent on tree cutting and grass cutting and over-grazing is most distressing. While the trees on Mathé Ran (the forest at the top) is well preserved, the excessive cutting of the grass has led to erosion of the soil on the slopes below, for instance, Alexandra Point, Panorama and Porcupine Point and other areas. This must be checked. Mr J. S. Lord, the active President of the Matheran Municipality is aware of this and has been contemplating plans to take protective measures.

We must act soon to preserve the precious qualities of this beautiful Hill Station.

CORRESPONDENCE

Winter visitors at Mahim Creek

I was interested to read the letter in the Correspondence section in the January issue written by Messrs Vipin Parikh and Vijay Bhatt in which they mentioned that a Redshank had one leg lame.

On several occasions I noticed Stilts and other long-legged birds at the Creek with only one good leg. I have also managed to intervene, more than once, when I have seen boys near the edge of the Creek catapulting the birds and this unthinkingly cruel pastime is a probable reason for the bird's lameness. There is one word of caution here though - sometimes various comparatively long-legged birds (including small waders) and certainly the Stilts at this Creek, occasionally stand on one leg with the other leg showing merely as a short sawn-off stump. There is obviously the utmost urgency to educate the young in all respects but this, unfortunately, will necessarily take some time. However, could not catapults be banned, as they are invariably used on living creatures? The World Wildlife might consider some campaign although their funds must be limited. While I was in the grounds of Bombay's apology for a zoo - Victoria Gardens - earlier this month two pairs of parakeets were fighting over a nest hole in a tree and being catapulted at the same time even though catapults are prohibited in the zoo. Perhaps the parakeets' problem was soon solved.

D. A. Stairmand
28.i.1971

Roosting flight

Almost every evening at about 7 p.m. I have been observing a group of birds flying in formation from west to east, possibly returning to their roosting places. Their number may be approximately 50. They are not Roseringed Parakeets about which I had referred to earlier. As they are flying at a considerable height, I have not been able to recognize them.

Yesterday evening at the same time I saw these birds circling in the western sky. I was confused at the time and thought they may be pariah kites, but very soon they broke the formation and continued their flight east.

The circling seemed to be very unusual and I wonder if you have also noted such group flight. If so, can you tell me what birds they could be. They flap their wings and the size is that of a crow. But the formation is something worth admiring.

B. A. Palkhiwalla

Bombay

13.iv.1971

Zafar Futehally

Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers

32-A, Juhu Lane

Andheri, Bombay 58-AS

EDITORIAL BOARD :

Dr. Salim Ali,
Bombay.

Mrs. Jamal Ara,
Ranchi.

Dr. Biswamoy Biswas,
Calcutta.

Kunvar Shri Lavkumar,
Rajkot.

Prof. K. K. Neelakantan,
Trivandrum.

Mr. B. R. Grubh,
Bombay.

Mr. R. L. Fleming, Junior,
Kathmandu, Nepal.

Mr. D. A. Stairmand,
Bombay.

Br. A. Navarro,
Bombay.

Editor :

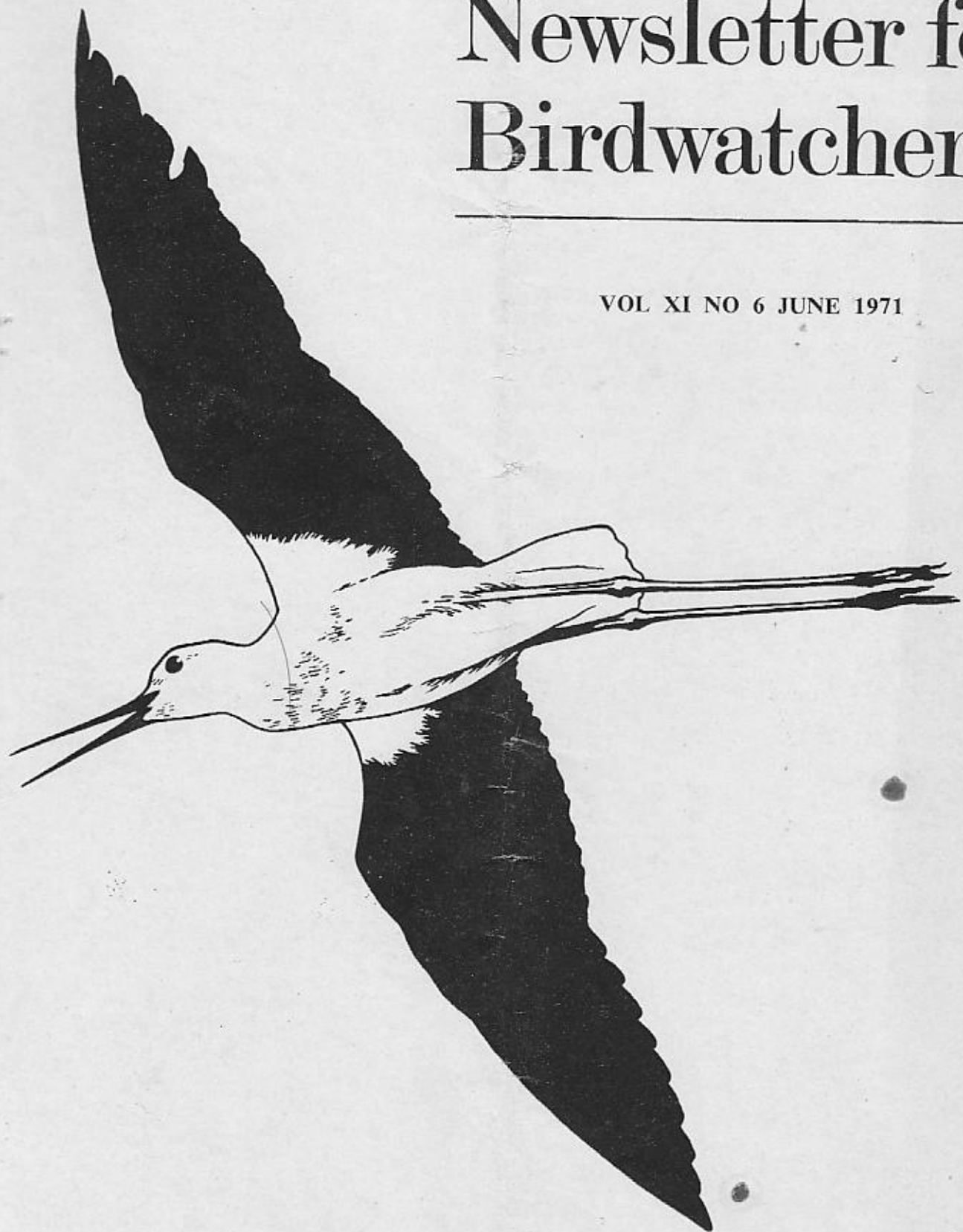
Mr. Zafar Futehally,
32A, Juhu Lane, Andheri,
Bombay-58 AS.

Annual Subscription Rs. 10/-.

Students Rs. 5/-.

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

VOL XI NO 6 JUNE 1971



NEWSLETTER FOR
BIRDPATCHERS

Volume 11, Number 6

June 1971

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Birdwatching around Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh, by B. D. Rana and A. P. Tyagi | 1 |
| Birds of Jamshedpur, by V. Narayana Swami | 4 |
| Birdwatching from a train, by S. K. Sen | 5 |
| The Indian Pitta and the Blue Chat, by D. A. Stairmand | 7 |
| Notes and Comments | 9 |
| Correspondence | 10 |

Bird notes from the Nilgiris, from Sarah Jameson

Two observations, from S. K. Sen

The Indian Pitta arrives on schedule in Borivli Park,
Bombay, from D. A. Stairmand

BIRDPATCHING AROUND MUZAFFARNAGAR, UTTAR PRADESH

B. D. Rana¹ and A. P. Tyagi²

Muzaffarnagar district is situated in NW, Uttar Pradesh, the mean latitude and longitude being 29°N., 77°E. It is about 52 miles east to west and about 30 miles north to south. The district has plenty of river water resources, viz. the Burhi Ganga, Solani, Kali Nadi, Krishna, Hindon, Katha, Khokhni, Ganges and Jamuna. Besides, there are a few canals and quite a few perennial lakes and tanks. The average rainfall varies from 45 cm to 100 cm. Little is, however, known about the avian fauna of Muzaffarnagar district. We are reporting here the birds seen during a week's observations in the month of May 1970.

18th May, we proceeded to Ahiyapur village. The area comprises mostly wetlands under irrigation, except a few dry land in patches. The main crops are wheat, barley, peas, gram, and other pulses. There are also orchards of mango, litchi or lokat, pear etc. and we are giving below a study of the birds in these groves and orchards.

In the orchards of mango, litchi and aru the conversational calls of the Jungle Babbler (Turdoides striatus), locally known as Dumri attracted our attention. They were hopping and feeding upon the ripe litchi and unripe mango fruits. Redvented Bulbuls (Pycnonotus cafer) were in abundance but there were a few Yellowvented Bulbuls (Pycnonotus leucogenys). Roseringed Parakeets (Psittacula krameri),

¹Animal Studies Division, Central Arid Zone Research Institute, Jodhpur

²Department of Zoology, D.A.V. College, Muzaffarnagar

House Crows (Corvus splendens) were seen on litchi fruits. Tree-pies (Dendrocitta vagabunda) were also seen hopping from one tree to another. We located koels (Eudynamis scolopacea) in the mango groves emitting sweet and lovely songs. The Magpie-Robin (Copsychus saularis), Pied Bush-Chat (Saxicola caprata), Whitebacked Munia (Lonchura striata), Hoopoe (Upupa epops), the Common Bee-eater (Merops orientalis) were also observed in the orchard.

We went farther into the mango and litchi gardens and observed the following species: The Pied Myna (Sturnus contra), the Yellowfronted Pied Woodpecker (Dendrocopos mahrattensis) excavating a hole with the help of its strong beak in the trunk of a Alubukhara tree, so we could see it very closely. The Common Hawk Cuckoo (Cuculus varius) was feeding upon lokat. There were Whitethroated Munias (Lonchura malabarica), Rufousbacked Shrikes (Lanius schach), both male and female Purple Sunbirds (Nectarinia asiatica), female Redstarts (Phoenicurus ochruros), Indian Robins (Saxicoloides fulicata), Redheaded Buntings (Emberiza bruniceps), Tickell's Flower Peckers (Dicaeum erythrorhynchos), Grey Tits (Parus major). We did not witness any interspecific competition in spite of the fact that the bird number was appreciable.

Next day, when we reached the scrubland, situated towards East-North to Muzaffarnagar on Jansath Road, a large number of Rock Pigeons (Columba livia) were found to be roosting in the crevices of bridges of an old Nala. The Ring Dove (Streptopelia decaocto) and the Little Dove (Streptopelia senegalensis), the Spotted Dove (Streptopelia chinensis) were seen together feeding along the harvested fields of wheat, gram and in other rabi crops followed by the pigeons. When we advanced farther into a sandy tract we met with the Blue Jay (Coracias benghalensis) which was preying upon the eggs of an unidentified species of bird, most probably of the Columbidae family. Large Green Bee-eaters (Merops superciliosus) were sitting near by a huge sand dune. Firstly we could not identify them, but a little while later, when they flew off a distance of about 50 yards, we could identify them. Groups of about 20 to 30 Jungle Crows (Corvus macrorhynchos) were found to sit nearby a water pot and hukka, where the meal of a working fieldman was kept. Crow-Pheasant (Centropus sinensis) were found in sugarcane fields.

The Bank Myna (Acridotheres ginginianus), the Common Myna (A. tristis) were feeding upon insects in an irrigated field. The Quaker Babbler (Alcippe poiocephala) and the Blackbellied Finch-Lark (Eremopterix grisea) were noticed by the bank of a dirty drain emerging of the Muzaffarnagar City. The following scavenger birds were found to be roosting on the Eucalyptus and pipal tree; the Whitebacked Vulture (Gyps bengalensis).

There were also White Scavenger (Neophron percnopterus), the Common Pariah Kite (Milvus migrans), and Crested Serpent Eagle (Spilornis cheela). The Black Drongo (Dicrurus adsimilis) was flying to and fro emitting the attractive call, most probably to assert its right to the territory it was in possession of. A large number of occupied nests of the Common Baya (Ploceus philippinus) were seen on a babool tree. The other common birds were the Tailor Bird (Orthotomus sutorius), the House Sparrow (Passer domesticus).

When we were walking on the bank of the Ganga canal, the following species of birds were seen in scrub-covered bank of the canal: peacock (Pavo cristatus), Grey Partridge (Francolinus pondicerianus), Grey Shrike (Lanius excubitor) and the Dusky Crag Martin (Hirundo concolor). Common Wood Shrike (Tephrodornis pondicerianus), the Common Rose Finch (Carpodacus erythrinus), a pair of Spotted Owlets (Athene brama), the Whitespotted Fantail Flycatcher (Rhipidura albogularis), the Whitebrowed Bulbul (Pycnonotus luteolus), the Large Pied Wagtail (Motacilla maderaspatensis) and the Wiretailed Swallow (Hirundo smithii).

Once when we visited the lakes, ponds and rivers, when it was raining during the day, we located roosts of the House Swift (Apus affinis) under the bridges of the rivers and canals. The Paddy Bird (Ardeola grayii) was seen preying upon fish fingerlings. The penetrating calls of both the Redwattled (Vanellus indicus) and the Yellow-wattled Lapwing (Vanellus malabaricus) attracted our attention. They were flying from one corner to the other in the irrigated field in search of their prey. The Pheasant-tailed Jacana (Hydrophasianus chirurgus) and the Indian Whiskered Tern (Chlidonias hybrida) were located in the sugarcane field, standing nearby a freshwater pond. The Pied King Fisher (Ceryle rudis) were found sitting together on a telegraph wire, crossing over the pond. The Grey Heron (Ardea cinerea) and a group of the Cattle Egrets (Bubulcus ibis) were seen several times. The Darter (Anhinga melanogaster) were located in a small group on the surface of the water, swimming with the body partially - sometimes completely submerged leaving only the head and neck exposed, swaying and turning this way and that in search of food.

Also encountered were the Little Grebe (Podiceps ruficollis), the Shoveller (Anas clypeata) in fair numbers and the Whitebreasted Water Hen (Amaurornis phoenicurus).

Late in the evening while returning to camp our attention was attracted towards the Whitenecked Stork (Ciconia ciconia) and the Little Green Bittern (Butoroides striatus) which were sitting on a huge stone. Both of these species were reluctant to fly off and allowed an unusually close approach.

In the avian community of the Muzaffarnagar district, we witnessed such a harmony and peaceful co-existence, that we could only wish that humans could take a lesson from them.

BIRDS OF JAMSHEDPUR

V. Narayana Swami*

Having equipped myself with Dr Salim Ali's The Book of Indian Birds, Hugh Whistler's Popular Handbook of Indian Birds and 7 x 35 binoculars, I did not want to allow lack of coaching by an expert to handicap me. In the last three months I have been doing a good deal of wandering around the woods and been able to observe and identify some fifty species of more common birds.

As I can lay some claim to being Jamshedpur's only bird-watcher (!) I wonder if readers might be interested in what I have seen around here. Moreover I have also a few questions to ask. But first let me mention what I have seen.

To begin with Pied and Common Mynas are found in plenty. And flitting to and fro about the ornamental duck-pond on the hostel lawns is a tiny bob-tail which I believe is the Ashy Wren-Warbler. A Common Wood-Shrike also pays visits to this beautiful lawn.

A few days back I saw a Black Drongo spending a few minutes on the Hostel terrace on its way to the woods outside. In the Tata Jubilee Park there are a number of Redvented Bulbuls and Purple Sunbirds. And a number of Tufted Pchards are found on the Jubilee Lake. On the lakeside I have seen a cluster of what I believe is the small Indian Skylark feeding on the ground. But then the books say larks and pipits are rather difficult to tell apart.

Out in the woods close-by lives a Crow-Pheasant which creeps silently up and down trees. But I was able to look at its chestnut wings and longish tail quite easily. Plenty of Green Bee-eaters fly high overhead. I have also seen in the same woods a tiny olive-green or olive-yellow bird with a white ring round its eye. Possibly a White-eye? Besides there is also an Indian Robin whistling lustily from its perch on a bush-top. It does not allow to be closely approached. I have also seen a group of Lapwings but since they are very wary of my presence, I could not get close enough to tell whether they are Red- or Yellow-wattled. Cattle Egrets are seen everywhere and on the 7th February I was particularly pleased to see two wagtails (Large Pied and Blackheaded Yellow) on the hostel lawns. I find that the

*Address. Management Programme, Xavier Inst., Jamshedpur 1

¹ November and December 1970, and January 1971.

Large Pied Wagtail keeps to watery areas, and the only explanation I can see for its presence was that the lawn was rather wet with the hose running on. These two birds hopped very freely about the lawn.

Now I have a few questions. First, there are a number of Pariah Kites flying overhead. Whenever one flies low (say 20 or 30 ft) I find that a crow chases it. After a minute or so the kite grows tired of the game may be, and flaps its wings once. This displaces such a lot of air that the crow flutters in mid-air and gives up the chase. Does the crow follow the kite because it feels food may be in the vicinity (especially as the kite is flying low)? If it is so why don't all the crows follow it?

On 7th February a sunbird was come across which was glossy black all over with a touch of cobalt blue on the sides of the neck. This might be the Purple Sunbird in breeding plumage. But (as the breeding season is given as March to May) does the plumage change this much in advance of the breeding season?

Answers to the above from members will be welcome.

BIRDWATCHING FROM A TRAIN

S. K. Sen

I reside in Calcutta and my work takes me to Kalyani, a place about 30 miles from Calcutta, several times in a month. I travel by train and it takes 1 hour and 15 minutes.

While most commuters spend the journey time by either reading a paper or a book, or dozing or just sitting and looking bored, I place myself at a window and look outside watching the feathered species. I was surprised to find how many did I see.

When the train passes a built-up area, there are the House Crows (Corvus splendens), Sparrows (Passer domesticus), semi-feral Blue Rock Pigeon (Columba livia), Fancy pigeons, domestic ducks on the ponds and domestic fowls. There are common mynas and one household had a pair of geese which looked like the Hawaiian Geese.

When the train passes a field or pond and wheels choked with water hyacinth, one can see hundreds of Cattle Egrets (Bubulcus ibis), most of them foraging on their own as there are not enough cattle about. There are also Little Egrets (Egretta garzetta) and Paddy Birds (Ardeola grayii) in plenty but not so numerous as the cattle egrets. Paddy Birds are so unattractively coloured until they take flight when their glistening white wings show up so well. The train passes so many wheels and ponds but I have never seen

a heron. If a marshy place appears, and there are quite a few on the way, one can see some Common Sandpipers (Tringa hypoleucos) and Spotted Sandpipers (Tringa glareola).

On the bank of a large clear pond once I saw six Lapwings flying in tee-ing and settling on the bank. Although it was rather far off, from the size, general colour and white wing-bar I was reasonably certain that they were Yellow-wattled (Vanellus malabaricus).

Track-side bushes and trees are always full of flocks of Pied Mynas (Sturnus contra) and House Sparrows (Passer domesticus) flying off and settling on a bush further away, as the train passes by. Seeing these very familiar birds in flocks gave me a different impression; they did not seem to appear so familiar after all! Once I saw a 'cloud' of sparrows passing over a field at a distance. Were they migrating? Off and on one can see groups of Jungle Crows (Corvus macrorhynchos) sitting on a branch or a wire, their black plumage glistening in the sun.

Sitting on the telegraph wire all along the track one always sees two or three Spotted Doves (Streptopelia chinensis), a lonely Black Drongo (Dicrurus adsimilis) or a couple of Common Bee-eaters (Merops orientalis), every now and again. Blue Jays (Coracias benghalensis) are also commonly seen sitting on the wire and posts.

On the ledge of a tall factory building along which the train passes, I have always met a small flock of Roseringed Parakeets (Psittacula krameri).

Most spectacular sight is when the train passes an animal carcass by the side of the track. There is a virtual feast there. Some stray dogs trying to have a bite, joined and encircled by a large group of Bengal Vultures (Gyps bengalensis), and very many of their kind in the air on their way to the feast. Above and around can be seen a whole lot of House Crows and Jungle Crows, all very noisy, sitting, flying and coming down to have a bite. Also in the air are a very large flocks of Pariah Kites (Milvus migrans), flying, circling and swooping. There is a melee of these birds in the air.

On the bushes, mainly lantana, along the track I have seen vivacious Redvented Bulbuls (Pycnonotus cafer), Common Wood Shrikes (Tephrodornis pondicerianus) swooping on their prey and Crow-Pheasants (Centropus sinensis) taking on their laboured flight to another shrub. Once I saw a male Koel (Eudynamis scolopacea), glistening black bird with red eyes.

Sitting on the branch over a pond or sometimes with no water near or flying, I have seen and recognised Common Kingfisher (Alcedo atthis); Whitebreasted Kingfisher (Halcyon smyrnensis) and Pied Kingfisher (Ceryle rudis). Sometimes I have seen a Tree Pie (Dendrocitta vagabunda) and a Blackheaded Oriole (Oriolus xanthornus). I have seen swallows of various species but could not identify them.

swallows circling over fields and open spaces but could not determine their identity. Occasionally an odd Grey Wagtail or a Magpie Robin can be seen.

Watching all these species between the months of May and December 1970, all from a running train and with bare eyes, I realised the truth of what Salim Ali says in his book, that Birdwatching can be indulged in wherever one may be and it does not need any equipment.

THE INDIAN PITTA AND THE BLUE CHAT

D. A. Stairmand

I found the Pitta and the male Blue Chat in a secluded corner of the Botanical Gardens, Ootacamund, in mid January. I had wandered a little way off the path and came to a likely looking place for birds as, inside a small opening, there was a pile of dead leaves, a fair amount of undergrowth and the area was almost completely shielded and shaded by trees. Nearby was a concealed ditch with a trickle of water and plenty of mulch.

As I approached this area I heard movement over the dead leaves but when I got inside the tangle saw nothing. But my interest had been awakened so I stood completely still and waited for perhaps ten minutes when I heard a bird moving over the leaves and the noise was getting louder. Then the Pitta came into sight; looked at me and continued to hop to the pile of leaves until it was only 20 feet from me. I was delighted as although I have been very lucky to see this bird in Bombay these last two Mays* I had no thought of seeing it that morning. While the Pitta was advancing a little 'blue' bird caught the corner of my eye but I resisted temptation and concentrated on the Pitta. However, the little blue bird refused to be ignored and hopped to within three feet of me. It was about the size of a sparrow, dull blue above with a white streak over the eye and bright chestnut below. I had never seen this bird before but my memory instantly flew to an illustration in Dr Salim Ali's Indian Hill Birds - a Blue Chat; and this was the male. Well I didn't lose the Pitta that morning and during the next four days I visited the Pitta and the Blue Chat as often as possible -- perhaps six times -- and spent up to an hour there each visit. The procedure was always the same - I would

* Readers will recall the Pitta's arrival dates, 18 May 1969 and 24 May 1970 in the Kanheri Caves vicinity, Bombay, recorded by Mr D. A. Stairmand (Newsletter 10(7): 5 et seq.

arrive - no Pitta, no Blue Chat. After a wait of 5-10 minutes the Blue Chat revealed himself and then the Pitta left cover and made for the pile of leaves just 20 feet from me. The birds showed no fear of me or my binoculars trained on them but any sound of footsteps on the nearby path made the birds alert. When people approached the Pitta would look up intently and perhaps turn and retreat a few hops towards cover and the Blue Chat would vanish below the undergrowth. When the footsteps receded the birds returned immediately to feed in their favourite spots.

Anyone who knows the Pitta well will, of course, realise that its ultra-serious facial expression and demeanour are lovably amusing to watch as it digs into the mulch violently hurling leaves and soil over its shoulder until it finds a grub which is swallowed, followed by a little meditation then back to work again. It is amazing how the Pitta's guady colours merge into the scene it frequents. Once I had waited in vain for 15 minutes for the Pitta and had almost given up hope that time. Then I noticed movement amongst the golden and red leaves and saw that it was the Pitta's upper parts working away - I had a view like a 'portrait-picture' as the Pitta had dug a big hole (or should I say 'pit'?) and this had not only obscured the bird but possibly also muffled the sound of its activities. I think it had been there the whole 15 minutes although possibly only watchful for most of the time. Then when it really got down for a grub, the crimson abdomen showed above the pit; again mingling with the background.

The Blue Chat spent most of his time on the ground too, although both birds are capable of flying long distances. The only exceptions were when he once flew from behind me to the Pitta's pile of mulch - and it was fast, low, noisy flight. The other time I saw it leave the ground it was only to perch on a very low horizontal twig and answer a nearby call with one of the same tenor - a harsh metallic chick chick chick, pause, chick chick chick with his tail moving up and down. Otherwise both birds making this call, as well as the Pitta, were silent throughout. The Blue Chat is an active pretty little bird always on the move, hopping around and digging into the soil with his bill - body and head stretched forward - one, two, three, four quick digs into the soil flicking it away, the success - a minute insect. This bird often came within ten feet of me.

I spent much time watching these two birds and these musings were only disturbed when a pair of Southern Blackbirds frightened the Pitta off on two occasions. I wished to leave these two birds as I had first found them - apparently safe and contented - and as I bade farewell to the lovely fat Pitta and that little Prince, the Blue Chat, the day.

9

before I was due to leave Ooty my heart was heavy. I went out into the sun and sat on a bench to make notes and I realised that a beautiful chapter in my life had ended. Then a Grey Wagtail came tripping around near my feet as I wrote; and the day brightened.

NOTES & COMMENTS

We received a letter recently from a reader of the Newsletter saying how sad it was that Stewart Melliush had left the country. His beautiful writing and meticulous birdwatching was greatly appreciated by everyone. Unfortunately another strong pillar of the Newsletter is leaving the country. D. A. Stairmand is going away on five months' leave and it is not certain whether he will return to India. But wherever he is I am sure he will continue to assist the Newsletter by his careful notes on Indian birds.

* * *

Incidentally a few contributors to the Newsletter have felt aggrieved that the editor has not used their material, and in consequence to use their own expression 'is discouraging their birdwatching'. The Newsletter has been the vehicle through which many beginners have attained a reasonable competence in birdwatching and it will continue to give every encouragement to people who write carefully and take the trouble to check over with references. We have now reached a certain standard of which we are proud, and are fortunately in a position to be somewhat more discriminating than we had been in previous years.

* * *

J. S. Serrao on whom the Editor leans so heavily for the production of the Newsletter complains that the Editor himself has been sitting back without making any effort on his own. This complaint has gone home and the Editor hopes to be more active in the future.

* * *

May we appeal to our Editorial Board, as well as to our readers, to send in suitable material before the end of June

CORRESPONDENCE

Bird notes from the Nilgiris

I have just (29.iv.1971)^{*} arrived up here to spend two months, and although I have not had much time yet for birdwatching, I have been aware very much of so many bird calls. I love hearing them all day long, and somehow the pleasure is intensified when I can identify them. I have heard the rich notes of the Southern Blackbird, the noisy conversation of Jungle Babblers, the soft sleepy cooing of the Spotted Dove. Most days I hear the Deccan Scimitar Babblers, and the urgent notes of the Ashy Wren-Warbler, the breeding season's wheechee wheechees of the Grey Tit, and the well known kutroo calls of the Small Green Barbet - or is it the Green Barbet? Their calls are almost identical. The Pied Bush-Chats are still round the house, and their song is surprisingly loud and sweet, though I mostly hear the stone-knocking calls.

I am glad to find the Common Pariah Kite family still in the huge old eucalyptus, and hear them daily. As I was driving up the Ghat road from Mettampaliyam on my way here, a Pariah Kite suddenly swooped down in front of my car and carried off a snake which must have been at least 4 ft long.

Sometimes I hear the pretty song of Tickell's Redbreasted Blue Flycatcher, and the 7 or 8-noted whistling song of the Whitespotted Fantail Flycatcher, and the loud clear double whistle of the Yellowbrowed Bulbul. Of course the cheerful calls of the Redwhiskered Bulebuls are heard every day, and I have found two nests in the garden.

As I arrived I was delighted to find a Magpie Robin singing away. I have heard the Hoopoe some days, and the Streaked Fantail-Warbler snipping his scissors overhead. Jungle Mynas, Sparrows and Jungle Crows are heard daily, and one morning I woke to hear the harsh grating sound of a Paradise Flycatcher. I have only twice seen one fly across the garden. Its strange how such a beautiful bird can have such an ugly voice!

On two occasions I have seen the Brown Shrike sitting on a telephone wire in the garden, the second time being yesterday, April 28th. Salim Ali writes in Birds of Kerala 'Winter visitor, (last date recorded 27th April)'. I wonder if I will see this bird again.

Most days I hear the chiks of the Small Sunbird. There are two or three here, usually sipping nectar from hibiscus blossoms, and as they are one of the less shy birds, I have often seen them at very close quarters. The males are in non-breeding plumage.

My first evening here I noticed two little birds outlined against the sunset sky. They looked like Bee-Eaters of

^{*}Letter dated 29.iv.1971

11

some kind, but I have never seen any here before. The next afternoon they were on the same bare twig at the end of the lowest branch of the big encalyptus, diving after insects every now and then. I have seen them every evening since, either one, two or three birds. Twice I have had an absolutely clear view of them in full sun from very close and there is no doubt whatever that they are Chestnutheaded Bee-eaters (Merops leschenaulti). I am very surprised to find them here, but delighted, as they are such attractively coloured birds. Salim Ali writes in Birds of Kerala:
' . . . hills up to about 3500 feet ', and Whistler says:
' . . . In the Nilgiri and Pulney Hills is common up to 5000 or 3000 feet respectively. ' Since this garden is all but 6000 feet above sea level, I am wondering if this is a record?

Sarah Jameson
Culmore, Coonoor, Nilgiris

The Indian Pitta arrives on schedule in Borivli Park,
Bombay

I went to the area below Kanheri Caves on the mornings of 16.v and 23.v in the hope of being able to see some of the first arrivals of one of the birds for which I have a deep affection, the Indian Pitta (Pitta brachyura). I had no luck on 16.v and much depended on my visit of 23.v as I was due to go on long leave and would be leaving Bombay for S. India during the following week-end. So 23.v was virtually my last chance to see the Pitta in Bombay.

I had spent from 6 a.m. to 7.45 a.m. patrolling what I knew to be Pitta's favourite area below Kanheri Caves but there had been no sight or sound of the bird. So I sat down for ten minutes and watched other birds, having largely given up all hope of finding the Pitta in that area. Some sunbirds were out of sight but merrily active in a tree in flower about 40 yards to my right and slightly behind me and I decided to get up and have a look at them. All thought of seeing the Pitta had vanished from my so that, as is usually the case, this was precisely when I saw it. Just as I got up and turned round a Pitta flew up from the ground onto a low branch of a tree wagging its tail, not so slowly, up and down. The time was 7.55 a.m. on 23.v and later on I saw other Pittas, perhaps five different individuals in all. They were all very shy and completely silent, unlike the first one I saw and heard last year which called away for long periods as mentioned in Newsletter Vol. 10(7). My recordings of the arrival of the Indian Pitta in this same area have been quite consistent over the three years I have been here:

18.v.1969

24.v.1970

23.v.1971

My birding has, of necessity, been generally limited to week-ends and holidays.

(I also have a remarkably consistent record with the Pied Crested Cuckoo but to give dates would embarrass me.)

The status of the Whitethroated Ground Thrush in Borivli still remains uncertain. There was no evidence of it below Kanheri Caves on 16.v but on 23.v it was impossible to miss as there were several birds singing away and I was able to see at least six of them. I could scarcely have missed their song on 16.v (and these thrushes should have been singing ~~then~~) however one bird on 23.v had a billful of food which looked, by the evasive movements of the bird, as if it was being taken to feed young. So the status in Bombay of this lovely thrush remains not only inconclusive but even more confused. As the Editor has said before it offers birdwatchers a subject for investigation.

Many of the typical birds of Borivli National Park were seen including Blackheaded Orioles, often with food for young, Goldfronted Chloropses in wonderful coloration with the blue on the wing very bright, pairs of Goldenbacked and parties of Mahratta Woodpeckers, Large Green Barbets, Blossomheaded Parakeets, pairs of Whitebellied and Racket-tailed Drongos, Tree Pies, Large Cuckoo Shrikes, Grey Jungleflow, Peafowl, several members of the cuckoo family and many others.

There was a troop of c. 20 Rhesus Macaques* feeding in a tree by the picnic spot at Tulsi Lake. Borivli has three types of monkeys - these, the Bonnet Macaques and Common Langurs. The Park also has Wild Pig, Hare, a few deer, etc. particularly the Barking Deer, many beautiful butterflies, and much more. Some devoted members of the Bombay Natural History Society have formed a Study Group and traced evidence of a few Leopards in the Park.

If there is no further encroachment and disturbance (which has increased a lot since I first went there 2½ years ago) is reduced Borivli can remain a fine Park for generations to come.

D. A. Stairmand
Bombay

*The distribution of the Rhesus Macaque is north of a line drawn from the mouth of the Tapti to the mouth of the Godaverri river. The troops seen in the Borivli National Park may either be the remanants or descendants of the animals released there during 1942-43. Consignments of this macque ear-marked for laboratories abroad were awaiting shipping space in Bombay at the time. But the stringency the Second World War brought in on shipping space made the Government to release the animals around Bombay. - Ed.

EDITORIAL BOARD :

Dr. Salim Ali,
Bombay.

Mrs. Jamal Ara,
Ranchi.

Dr. Biswamoy Biswas,
Calcutta.

Kunvar Shri Lavkumar,
Rajkot.

Prof. K. K. Neelakantan,
Trivandrum.

Mr. B. R. Grubh,
Bombay.

Mr. R. L. Fleming, Junior,
Kathmandu, Nepal.

Mr. D. A. Stairmand,
Bombay.

Br. A. Navarro,
Bombay.

Editor :

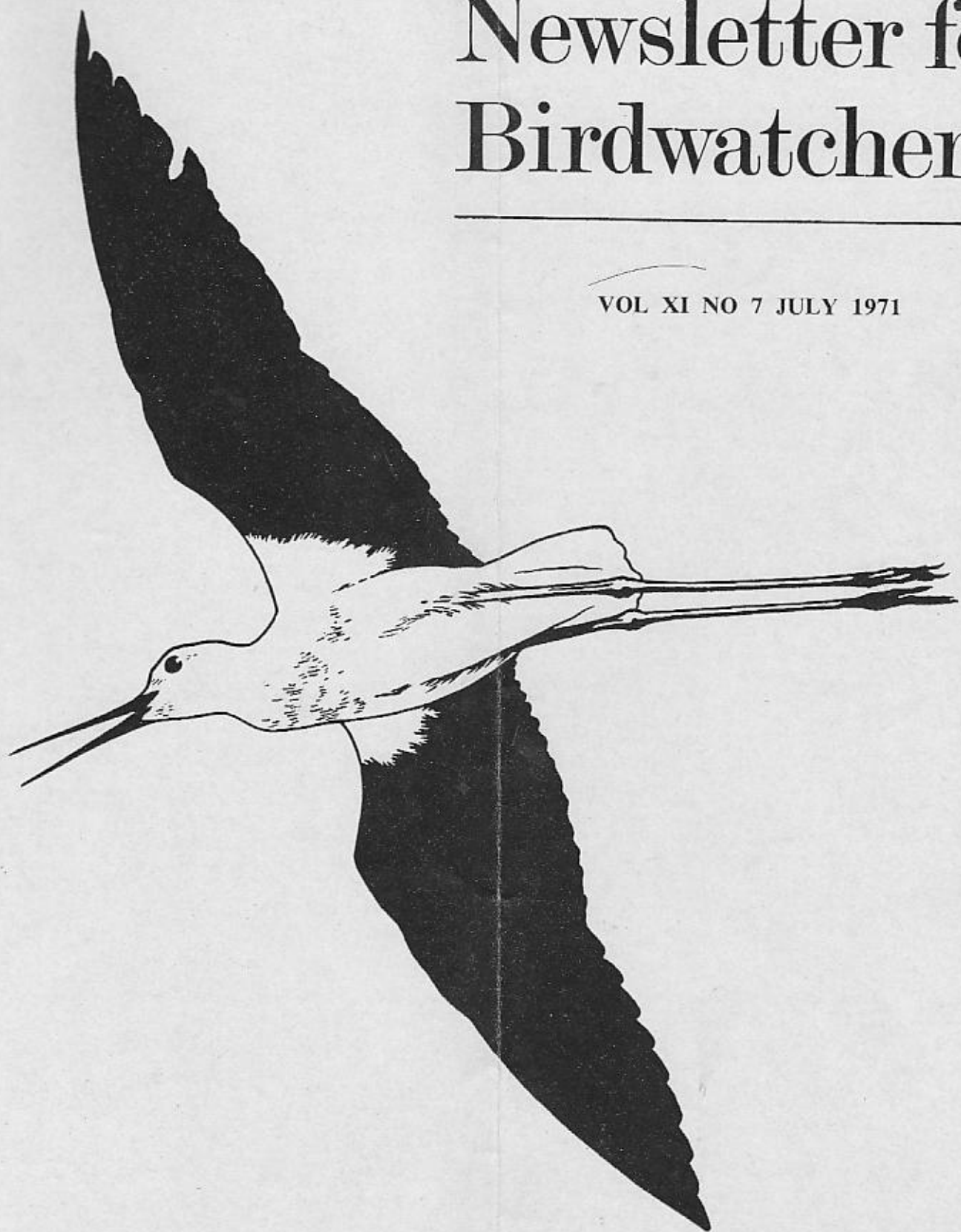
Mr. Zafar Futehally,
32A, Juhu Lane, Andheri,
Bombay-58 AS.

Annual Subscription Rs. 10/-.

Students Rs. 5/-.

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

VOL XI NO 7 JULY 1971



NEWSLETTER FOR

BIRDWATCHERS

July 1971

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Birds around Tiger Tops Hotel, Chitwan District, Nepal, by Robert L. Fleming | 1 |
| Birds at Mt Abu, by B. M. Shukla | 3 |
| Vihar Lake, Borivili National Park, by G. De | 5 |
| Vedanthangal, by D. A. Stairmand | 6 |
| The Houbara, by Madansinhji of Kutch | 9 |
| Black Drongo (<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>) fishing, by J. S. Serrao | 10 |
| Notes and Comments | 10 |
| Correspondence | 12 |

Pied Crested Cuckoo in Bihar, from Jamal Ara

'Strange Thrushes, Turdus unidentifiabilis', from Winston Creado

BIRDS AROUND TIGER TOPS HOTEL, CHITWAN DISTRICT, NEPAL

Robert L. Fleming

A brief summary of some of the 120 species of birds found near Tiger Tops may be of interest to our readers. My visit there was on 17-19th of May 1971.

Located in the newly created Royal Chitwan National Park about a hundred miles south-southwest of Kathmandu, this area is the last Nepal stronghold of the Onehorned Rhinoceros. Immediately to the south of the hotel rise the ridges of the Someshwar Range with the Indian border of Bihar only about three miles away. To the west flows the mighty Narayani river. Immediately to the north is the Reu river and beyond that the Rapti river. A twenty-five miles stretch of dun land extends to the Mahabharata Range with a backdrop of eternal snows of Himalchuli and Annapurna. To the east one again finds the Reu and also the Sorung. The altitude varies from 900 feet to 1500 feet.

A heavy, mixed forest with many sal trees, surrounds Tiger Tops. Parakeets, minivets, jungle mynas, doves and bulbuls calling from tall trees, swelled the early morning chorus. The commonest drongo was the Crowbilled Drongo, Dicrurus annectans with its forked, slightly upturned tail. The most spectacular woodpecker was the Large Yellownaped Woodpecker, Picus flavinucha, though the Goldenbacks (three- and four-toed) added sound and colour. Loud double notes from a shady ravine revealed a pair of trim and striking

Greenbreasted Pittas, Pitta sordida and their companions, Orangeheaded Ground Thrushes, Zoothera citrina. In the distance came the clatter of Pied Hornbills while among the trees overhead sounded the metallic kluk of the Dark Roller, Eurystomus orientalis. The pitta and roller are summer nesters which arrive the end of April.

Up on the Someshwar ridges a few hundred feet above Tiger Tops, one has a grand view of Rapti Dun, the Megauli airstrip and the northern mountains. Numerous bauhinia flowers attracted purple sunbirds, goldenfronted chloropsises and streaked spiderhunters. The varied whistles of the Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo, Dicrurus remifer, enlivened shaded ravines. We saw no larger racket-tails though they are numerous over the range, in the bhabar and terai forests a few miles to the south. Large Necklaced Laughing Thrushes, Garrulax pectoralis, bathed in a trickling stream. Strange that their smaller cousins, not seen here, are so common in the open terai forests.

Among bushes edging a broad, shallow river basin and vast expanses of swam grass, was an assortment of longtailed wren warblers -- Franklin's, Hodgson's, Stewart's ashy and the streaked wren warbler. But the loveliest of all, grasping a slender stem above the reeds, with rays of the afternoon sun striking it, was the dainty Yellowbellied Longtailed Wren Warbler, Prinia flaviventris. It sang a snatch of a song before disappearing. Black Partridges and peafowl were in evidence. Rather numerous was the Lesser Crow Pheasant, Centropus toulou, perched singly above the sea of vegetation, giving its plaintive call kuk kuk kuk, tállapa-tállapa-tállapa. In the drier spots, elephant riders invariably scared up a half dozen Grass Owls, Tyto capensis which wavered awkwardly off through the sky.

A visit to the wide Narayani river revealed an empty expanse of sand. In May no ducks, cormorants nor porpoises. But it was not quite empty for there was one lone Small Pratincole, Glareola lactea. After a bit a spurwinged plover flew by, then river and blackbellied terns and a single black ibis. A large gavial crocodile came out to sun himself on a sandbank followed by a marsh mugger. From a distant tree emerged a Greyheaded Fishing Eagle, Ichthyophaga nana, and moments later an osprey passed by on graceful wings. It was too late in the day to see the flight of the giant hornbills, a laborious wing-beat and glide, one after another, across the Rapti river.

It was late afternoon when a guard, with rifle in hand, and I started for a heronry near the Sorung stream. Our forest road was 'littered' with fresh tiger tracks. A green pigeon flew above the path with a twig in its beak. It was an Orangebreasted Green Pigeon, Treron bicincta. Three times it flew back and forth still holding the twig. As soon as we moved away from the tree against which the

guard leaned, the bird flew there to its nest site. Immediate to our right rose the Someshwar ridge. The startled voice of a Kalij Pheasant, Lophura leucomelana, came from a sunny spot under the trees. Then out stalked a cock bird straggly black crest erect, scolding as he went. The rays of the sun enhanced his livid face and cast a blue sheen on his dark feathers.

We now turned away from the hill into a tunnel of tall swamp grass towards a ten foot platform facing the heronry and a lagoon. We eased ourselves up the ladder and onto the machan. Directly in front a Purple Heron, Ardea purpurea, stood above its nest containing one egg. To the right, in a mass of taller grass were a hundred birds -- four species of egrets, many pond herons and one lone small cormorant. Then it was that I was distracted by a loud bubbling sound. Over in a large puddle to the left and just beyond a fringe of reeds, I discovered three partially submerged rhinos with bank mynas on their backs! Latter another pair attempted to join them but were challenged and were only allowed to occupy a shallow edge of the pool. Finally yet another beast appeared but had no difficulty taking his place in the deeper water. About that time a whitebreasted waterhen skidded across the lagoon and then appeared a bicoloured bittern, yellowish below and darker and streaked above. In the fading light blue-tailed bee-eaters skimmed through the air after insects. Then one of the rhinos began to moo like a cow. The guard whispered that we should be going back as it was getting dark. Along the forest road jungle nightjars flew out of our way while a hawk owl watched us pass under his perch. The guard interpreted a movement in the grass nearby as 'pig' and the breaking of a stick as 'bear'. The North Indian Scops Owl, Otus scops, had begun his monotonous triple whistle took-to-took, as we turned into Tiger Tops Hotel for a shower and supper.

BIRDS AT MT ABU

B. M. Shukla

Three days are too short for exploring the bird population of a hill-resort like Mt Abu. However, having seen all 'places of interest' on a previous visit, we decided to devote as much time as possible to an exercise in birdwatching during our four day trip from 9th-12th May 1971. It was soon realised how difficult and yet how exciting this pastime can be in a completely arboreal surrounding like Mt Abu. Easiest places to watch birds is a shallow lake or a jheel in winter and a semi-dry or open country where

July 1971

trees grow in small clusters. In such places, birds reveal their identity immediately. On the mountains however, birds play hide-and-seek in dense green foliage. Thorny bushes and impassable valleys make a closer approach impossible. Although forests are resounding with bird-music the whole day, it is very difficult to locate and identify the birds.

On the first morning Bharati, Pradeep and myself had a walk up to a place called Adhardevi. One need not climb up Adhardevi for birdwatching but there is a dry rivulet at the place where the climb begins. We saw red-rumped swallows engaged in nesting activities and feeding their young in their mud-nests in caves formed from mountain rocks. Magpie Robin was in a happy mood singing lustily from his perch on a dry simul tree. Thickets around this dry rivulet were full of bulbuls (both redvented as well as red whiskered); grey and yellowcheeked tits were probing for food in the green foliage in 'Shirshasan*' style. Fantail flycatchers were hopping from place to place in a very restless mood. Tickell's Blue Flycatcher was seen hopping between rocks and dry leaves in search of insects.

Morning hours on the second day were spent near Craig Point. On account of some foot trouble I could not leave the car for a walk but my wife and Pradeep who had a good walk around confirmed that the place was full of white-eyes, bulbuls, coppersmiths, warblers and ioras. I did see common Iora close-by and we enjoyed the pleasant call sho-bee-gee.

Spending 'after-lunch' time under the cool shade of trees, we saw small minivets.

On the third day, we went exploring areas around Nakki Lake and parked our car on the farther end of the lake. On one side was the lake with deep waters. On the other side of the road, there was a valley with huge green peepal and jamun trees. There were also some bare rocks from which a trickle of water was flowing.

Our experience in home garden had been that birds have a great fascination for trickling water. Whenever the water tap near the lawn was left partially open with water falling out in small droplets, we had noticed that all birds of the garden used to come near the tap for a sip or a dip.

Based on this experience, we had thought that best place for birdwatching in forest surroundings should be one like this, with thick forest, some open rocks and a trickle of water. Our guess proved quite correct and true to expectation, we could see almost a representative cross section of bird population near this place.

White-eyes, fantail flycatchers, Tickell's blue flycatchers, white and yellowcheeked tits, tailor birds, bulbuls, spotted doves and a variety of warblers were visible, hopping

*Topsy-turvy or inverted position - Ed.

ping from bush to trees and to the rock.

We suddenly came across a new bird ('new' as far as we were concerned) of greenish colour, and long kingfisher like bill and were trying to establish its identity when the youngest of the family Dhiren found out from Salim Ali's book, and we were convinced that it was large green barbet. Soon the typical note ku-trook-ku-trook began to reverberate in the trees. Later, during the day when we were resting near Trevor Lake, we saw large green barbets in nesting activity and feeding their young.

This spot near Nakki Lake yielded another surprise. The youngest came out with an announcement that he had seen something like a paradise flycatcher whose picture he had seen in the books. Since this was another 'new find' for us, a serious hunt began for locating this bird and after some searching someone located two long serpent-like streamers in the foliage and we could soon find out that it was 'young' paradise flycatcher whose plumes had not attained white colour. There must be quite a few in the area but we had no more time nor leisure for this.

In the evening, family had a climb on the Toad Rock and Pradeep reported that he had seen whitebellied drongo.

I have not mentioned the commoner birds which are found in plenty, such as Indian Robins, Brahminy Mynas, Jungle Crows and babblers. However, absence of common green bee-eaters and shrikes was noticeable.

VIHAR LAKE, BORIVILI NATIONAL PARK

G. De

A walk through the woods in the northwestern part of Vihar Lake on the 30th May reminded me once more that cuckoos are the harbingers of monsoon in Bombay. At several spots one could hear the assiduous call bou-katha-kao (in Bengali it means: 'Honey, say something') of the Indian Cuckoo (Cuculus micropterus). Occasionally, the reproachful tirade Oh-lo, oh-lo, oh-lo, oh-lo, oh-lo . . ., Pa-peeha, pa-peeha, pa-peeha of the Common Hawk-Cuckoo (Cuculus varius) could be heard. The Koel (Eudynamis scolopacea) by means of his enticing crescendo Ku-hu, ku-hu, ku-hu . . . and his lady through her monosyllabic pik-pik-pik kept their presence felt. At the same spot as in the last year, I was pleased to see a pair of Pied Crested Cuckoo (Clamator jacobinus) as also hear their nasal soprano pneee-pne-pne, pneee-pne-pne, pneee-pne-pne. They perhaps belonged to the first batch of visitors of the season and it may be noted that Bombay experienced its first heavy shower in the evening of the 29.v.1971. At one spot, this musical morning was accompanied by another cuckoo-like call and for about 10 minutes I was straining with binoculars and

cocked ears with a hope to meet a new species of cuckoos, ultimately to find that a Greater Racket-tailed Drongo (Dicrurus paradiseus) was my detracter. This chorus of cuckoos was joined by an Indian Plaintive Cuckoo (Cacomantis merulinus) putting forth its Oh-lee, oh-lee, oh-lee... like the continuous but subdued background note of an orchestra, from a tree-top by the side of the Powai Lake. The only missing member of this orchestra was the Drongo-Cuckoo (Surniculus lugubris) with its Kuh-kuh-kuh-kuh-kuh-kuh in a rising scale, who is an unfailing partner of monsoon in this area.

The recent observation of the following two species in the Vihar-Tulsi Lake area of Bombay is worth noting in view of the seeming rarity of their occurrence in this area:

- (a) A Combed Duck (Sarkidiornis melanotus) was observed on 18.iv.1971 at the northernmost edge of Vihar Lake at about 8.00 a.m. for more than half an hour. The bird was most of the time preening.* There were two Spotbill Ducks (Anas poecilorhyncha) near it, feeding themselves. In the earlier part of the watching, there were a flock of Gullbilled Terns (Gelochelidon nilotica), Brownheaded Gulls (Larus brunnicephalus), one Herring Gull (L. argentatus) and two Caspian Terns (Hydroprogne caspia) at the same spot. The bird had a small blob on its bill.
- (b) About a dozen Grey Hornbills (Tockus birostris) were observed in the woods between Vihar and Tulsi Lake on 8.v.1971 at about 7.00 a.m. The birds were engaged in feeding on and gliding past trees. Each of them had a distinct casque on its beak. Black subterminal band on graduated tail was prominent only in some birds. On 10.v.1971 at about 7.30 a.m. one bird was observed on a roadside tree, a little beyond Tulsi Lake, feeding energetically on yellow berry-like fruits. The casque with black side of the bills and graduated tail with white tip and subterminal black band were clearly visible.

VEDANTHANGAL

D. A. Stairmand

I fervently hope that the following exchange of letters between Prof. K. K. Neelakantan and myself will be a cause of great concern not only to all readers of the Newsletter but to such bodies as the Bombay Natural History Society and the World Wildlife Fund.

*Regarding status of this duck in the Salsette refer to footnote to p. 2 of Newsletter Vol. 11(3), March 1971 - Ed.

I wrote to Prof. Neelakantan on 14th April 1971 as follows:

'I have just received a copy of the April issue of the Newsletter and read your measured comments on The Pelicanry at Kolamuru which were largely prompted by Brig. Lokaranjan's earlier letter to the magazine. Since I paid an afternoon's visit to Vedanthangal on 11th January this year I have intended to write a few remarks on the disappointment I experienced there and Brig. Lokaranjan's remarks about the possible absence of pelicans in Aredu-Lolamuru region stirred my memory afresh. The Editor of the magazine wisely solicited comments from you and in the last paragraph of your article you touch upon the deplorable state that Vedanthangal is now in, with a promise to expand on this later. I shall be very interested to read your article on Vedanthangal.

'Before I visited Vedanthangal I had read several times Spillett's survey on the Sanctuary in Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society Vol. 65 and you can well imagine what I expected to see and the shock at what was actually there - or more to the point, what was not there, when I visited the place.

'Spillett said that the canopy of a grove of 500 Barringtonia occupied about half the area of the tank. On my visit on 11th January 1971 I personally could count only c. 70 trees on the tank and these must have occupied only about one-tenth of the area of the tank at most. I spoke to Government employees and one of them told me there were 117 Barringtonia on the tank. I was perfectly willing to accept this figure. So what had happened to the other Barringtonia that were there previously? The answer I was given was that they had all died of old age within the last 2-3 years. This I could not accept. After all this has been a nesting colony for waterbirds for a very considerable time, according to Spillett, and it seemed incredible that so many trees should all die at once.

'I was informed by another Government employee that on day I was at Vedanthangal there were over 10,000 birds on the tank. He was including duck, etc. but the figure was pure fantasy. I regret I did not make even a rough estimate of the number of birds nesting there but was it about 1000? Most waterbirds appeared to be just sitting around in a melancholy state. There were few Darters and I saw no sign of pelicans or storks, other than openbills.

'I very much regret that I made so few notes on this visit but I was so extremely disappointed and perturbed over the fate of the birds that I was jogged out of my usual routine of noting even disappointments. I did mention the present state of Vedanthangal to Mr J. C. Daniel when I returned to Bombay.

'Getting away from Vedanthangal specifically I would add that my sister came to this country in February for

one month's holiday and I sent her up to Nal Sarovar for a visit. The birds that impressed her most were not flamingos but pelicans. You know how huge pelicans look in their natural state and for her to see these birds fishing and then rising from the water in flight was her greatest thrill of all while birdwatching in India.

Yours etc....'

Prof. Neelankantan's reply dated 23rd April contained the following remarks:

'Thank you for your letter of the 14th April. I went to Vedanthangal just 6 days after your visit. Unfortunately, we reached there only at 5.45 p.m. and left the tank before 7. I, too, was shocked by the sight of the scattered, diseased-looking trees, and noted only that there were at least 11 species on the crowns of the Barringtonias, with a few hundred unidentifiable duck and some Little Grebes floating on the water. The Paid Stork was definitely not present.

'The 11 breeding birds were: White Ibis, Little Cormorants, a few Shag, Darter (about 50?), Openbill Stork, Cattle Egret, 2 other Egrets (Little and Median?), Spoonbill, Grey Heron and Night Heron. No attempt was made to estimate numbers. Isn't your 1000 too low an estimate?

'I think you are right in saying that only some 70 trees survive - very precariously. I too wondered why the trees in the tank should have started dying out all of a sudden. So far as I could gather, two important changes have been introduced since the promotion of the heronry into an official Sanctuary: the phosphate-rich water is no longer released into the neighbouring fields, and the traditional practice of removing the silt from the tank bed annually (after the birds have left) has been stopped. Could these, I wonder, be the reasons for the decay of the trees? Death from old age need not be ruled out, but there should have been natural regeneration also. Perhaps the limit of tolerance of the trees to the chemical contents of the water has been crossed in recent years. Also, the accumulation of silt around their bases may be detrimental to the trees. It would certainly have been wiser on the part of the authorities to permit time-honoured exploitation of the manure-laden water and mud.

'Some attempts have been made, it seems, to plant Barringtonia on the tank bed. But so far no sapling has survived the first flooding.

'What matters to us is that, at this rate, very soon there will be no trees in the tank. And the Tourist Lodge and watch tower will be Ancient Monuments commemorating an extinct sanctuary.

'As I have already let off steam on one page of the official Visitors' Book at Vedanthangal, I would rather leave it to you to write on this subject for the Newsletter. So

July 1971

9

please go ahead.

Yours, etc.'

Prof. Neelakantan has brought several cogent facts to light regarding the sad deterioration of Vedanthangal as a Sanctuary for nesting waterbirds. Surely it was the height of folly for Officialdom to change time-honoured custom which had put Vedanthangal in the forefront of its type of Sanctuary. This Sanctuary had been protected by the villagers of Vedanthangal for perhaps hundred of years not purely on the grounds of sentiment alone but because the villagers themselves derived great benefit from the manure of the birds' droppings which was released into their neighbouring fields. Under the new system nearly all benefit has been lost to the villagers and the state of the birds is pathetic.

I agree with Prof. Neelakantan's list of the 11 breeding birds. It may well be that my estimate of 1000 birds nesting was a little too low but I would stress one point very clearly -- many birds that had gone to Vedanthangal to nest were not nesting when I saw them. They simply had not got the space.

It will undoubtedly take many years to restore Vedanthangal to its former glory but however long and arduous the task and the amount of endeavour involved this surely must be done.

THE HOUBARA

Madansinhji of Kutch

Kutch has had very good rains last year (1970) but the migratory position of the Imperial Sandgrouse, and duck remains the same, i.e. the former is not seen, and the duck were very few in the jheels to which normally in good years they come in good numbers. The Greylag geese have stopped coming for a long time.

The migration of the Houbara (Chlamydotis undulata macqueenii) was also poor this year. I have been noticing for the last few years that each year the number of birds visiting seems to be getting less. In the dunes on the seaside near and around Mandvi where we used to get 12 or more birds in a day's driving we hardly see more than 12 or 15. Formerly the number of birds seen in a day's drive was 40 to 50.

But the migration of both the Grey Quail and Rain Quail was strong. Both the birds have come in good numbers and between March 17, 1971, and up to date (8 April) 2 guns have bagged over 150 birds. The Rain Quail, are calling and it appears to me that they are breeding. Normally they come with the monsoon and breed here; but this time they

have stayed over and are found in good numbers along with the Grey Quail. I have not seen their nests but my shikaries have found oviduct eggs while cleaning the birds.

Of course the local game such as partridges and hare are fast disappearing mostly because of snaring in and out of the season. Both partridges and hare are sold in the market.

Depredations in Houbara numbers caused by the wealthy oil-rich Sheiks of Arabia received considerable publicity in the press last year. Some schemes are afoot to breed houbaras in captivity and release them in suitable areas for those interested in falconry. We hope that this artificial breeding will commence before the last bird in the wild becomes extinct as a result of over hunting. - Ed.

BLACK DRONGO (DICRURUS ADSIMILIS) FISHING

J. S. Serrao

Standing at the edge of a canal along the western bank of the Vihar Lake, Borivli National Park on 14.iii.1971, we were watching a large number of Black Drongos gathered on the Lake shore. There was a drongo on every low bush dotting the shore, as also on every piece of dead wood or stick jutting out a few inches above the ground. From these vantage points they sallied forth every now and again foraging low along the ground.

One of the drongos nearest to us left its perch, flew to the canal and started hovering low over the water. As we now stood wondering what its next move would be, the bird splashed on to the water and took off carrying a tiny fish in its beak. Settling on the bank opposite us, it battered the wriggling prey limp. Disposing it off the drongo flew back to its perch. We now waited in vain for about half an hour for a repeat performance, but were disappointed. The canal water contained shoals of tiny fish (mostly Aplocheilichthys lineatus and Rasbora daniconius) moving into the lake.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Grants for Bird Study

The Bombay Natural History Society has instituted a fund known as the Salim Ali-Loke Ornithological Research Fund for fostering field research on Indian birds. Small grants are available, either ad hoc or tenable for a specified

period, to students of zoology and serious amateur bird watchers who wish to investigate a specific problem of bird ecology. While the Society is recognized by the University of Bombay as a guiding institution for post-graduate research in Field Ornithology leading to the M.Sc. and Ph.D. degrees, applicants need not necessarily be university students. The main object is to encourage and foster among all classes an intelligent interest in the living bird in its natural habitat. To this end, applications from young people and undergraduates will be equally welcome. Details of the problem, and the ways in which it is proposed to study it, should be submitted with the application, together with evidence of the candidate's competence and an indication of the financial assistance required, to the Honorary Secretary, Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, Bombay 1-BR.

* * * * *

One Fellowship may possibly be given to V. S. Vijayan of the Bird Banding Group of the Bombay Natural History Society. He intends to study the impact of bulbuls on Agricultural Economy. Economic ornithology is a branch in which little work has been done so far, and holds many possible fields of study in relation to cultivated plants. There are many species of granivorous and fruit-eating birds which directly or indirectly influence plant ecology. The purpose of the present project is to study a few such species in relation to silviculture.

The objectives of the research will be: (i) to investigate the role of bulbuls in the dispersal of plants; (ii) to assess the aggregate effect on Indian forests and silvicultural practices; (iii) to determine the influence, if any, of food plant on the distribution of bulbuls.

The methods employed will be to: (i) study the flora with special reference to the fruit yielding trees, and plants and their main seasons of flowering and ripening of fruits; (ii) classify the plants into economic importance; (iii) observe the feeding habits in the field; (iv) analyse stomach contents both quantitatively and qualitatively from nestling to adult stage; (v) make thorough population study by visual counts and netting; (vi) estimate how much one individual consumes per day; (vii) compare the stomach contents of the same species at different stations; (viii) collect sample seeds; (ix) feed captive birds with known berries to find out the quantity of consumption and preferences to berries; (x) sow the seeds collected from both faeces of the bulbuls.

Shri Vijayan will appreciate if any readers of the Newsletter would assist him in this investigation by supplying relevant data.

CORRESPONDENCE

Pied Crested Cuckoo in Bihar

The Pied Crested Cuckoo (Clamator jacobinus) was heard in the Harmu Housing Colony, Ranchi, on 20.v.1971 at 1.45 a.m. We are having rains since April. Last year I have heard and observed this bird as late as October 7, in Chajjubagh, Patna.

The first Pied Crested Cuckoo was observed in Patna this year on 9.vi.1971. There was heavy rain next morning (10.vi.1971).

Jamal Ara
Ranchi, Bihar.

'Strange Thrushes, Turdus unidentifiabilis'

I have seen a spate of reports on 'Strange Thrushes, Turdus unidentifiabilis' in recent issues of the Newsletter, and I would like to contribute my own particular enigma to this section:

Some time ago I saw a strange thrush in my garden by the seashore at Juhu (Bombay). It was rather a large bird, about the size of an oriole, and it was skulking in the sparse hedge and hopping about on the ground. It seemed relatively unafraid of human beings. It was a dull brown in colour, with blackish wings and tail - the tail also having white corners. The sides of the bill were a conspicuous pale orange, and there was a broken necklet of black spots across the breast.

There have been several recent references to the Eyebrowed Thrush in the Newsletter, but the thrush I saw, as far as I could make out, had neither eye brows nor eyelashes.

Winston Creado
'Blossom', Silver Beach, Juhu
Bombay 54

Zafar Futehally
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers
32A, Juhu Lane
Andheri, Bombay 58-AS

EDITORIAL BOARD :

Dr. Salim Ali,
Bombay.

Mrs. Jamal Ara,
Ranchi.

Dr. Biswamoy Biswas,
Calcutta.

Kunvar Shri Lavkumar,
Rajkot.

Prof. K. K. Neelakantan,
Trivandrum.

Mr. B. R. Grubh,
Bombay.

Mr. R. L. Fleming, Junior,
Kathmandu, Nepal.

Mr. D. A. Stairmand,
Bombay.

Br. A. Navarro,
Bombay.

Editor :

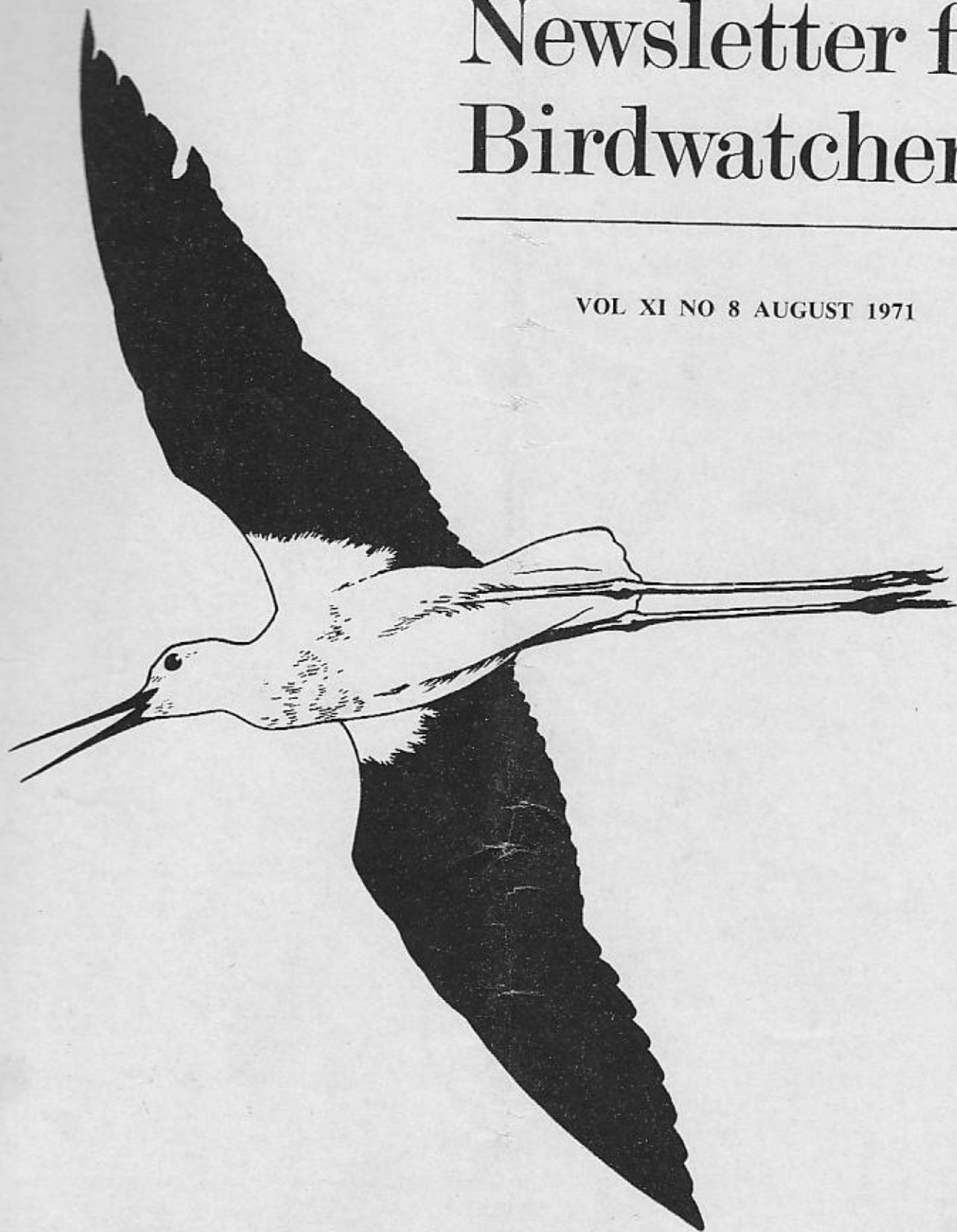
Mr. Zafar Futehally,
32A, Juhu Lane, Andheri,
Bombay-58 AS.

Annual Subscription Rs. 10/-.

Students Rs. 5/-.

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

VOL XI NO 8 AUGUST 1971



NEWSLETTER FOR
BIRDWATCHERS

August 1971

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| The Heronry at Koonthakulam, Tirunelveli district, Tamil Nadu, by J. Mangalaraj Johnson | 1 |
| Birding near Ooty, by D. A. Stairmand | 4 |
| In Memoriam Kolleru Pelicanry?, by K. K. Neelakantan | 7 |
| Confrontation among Koels, by Zafar Futehally | 8 |
| The rains and birdlife around Bombay, by J. S. Serrao | 9 |
| Bird notes from the Nilgiris, by Sarah Jameson | 10 |
| Owlets: How Swamiji Shri Japanandji of Shree Ramkrishna Mission at Abu was saved from confrontation with a tiger on the banks of the Narbada, by Sursinhji Jadeja | 11 |
| Notes & Comments | 12 |
| Correspondence | 12 |
| 'Birds of Jamshedpur', from Mrs Sarah Jameson | |
| The Monal Pheasant, from R. N. Mukherjee | |
| News for Bird Enthusiasts, from Shama Futehally | |

THE HERONRY AT KOONTHAKULAM, TIRUNELVELI DISTRICT,
TAMIL NADU

J. Mangalaraj Johnson

Koonthakulam (77°46'E., 8°29'N., 60 metres above m.s.l.) is a pleasant little pastoral village with fertile paddy fields in the Naguneri taluk of Tirunelveli district. Communal breeding of waterbirds (egrets, night herons and painted stork) has been known from times immemorial. These birds nest on trees within house compounds and on fields close by.

Chosen Village. Most of the paddy fields are owned by Telegu talking vegetation Pannaiyars, who are said to have said to have migrated from Andhra some 300 years back, during a famine. They had been, all along, the anxious caretakers and cautious custodians of the breeding birds and had prevented other meat-eating communities from molesting nests and nestlings. Anyone found to have harmed or killed a fledgeling was taken in procession around the village, with the dead bird tied around his neck. Such punishments effectively provided protection. Now, of course, everyone

is proud of the unique privilege of playing host to the breeding birds and is happy to be the resident of the chosen village.

A second crop. The Koonthakulam tank is fed by Manimuthar channel and normally contains water enough for one crop only. A second crop is possible only during the years when water is available for longer periods in the tank. The waterbirds instinctively know these years as the local people believe and nest in large numbers as the local belief goes, continuing their breeding activities later than the usual time. So, birds breeding in large numbers are always welcome as it is a sign of the possibility of a second crop.

Choice of site-influencing factors. As with Koonthakulam assurance of availability of adequate aquatic food, protection from predators, occurrence of suitable host trees and accessibility to nesting materials, chiefly influence waterbirds in their initial choice of site for their communal breeding. Once a site is chosen and utilized for some years, the future generations are known to persist in spite of human interference and disturbance.

Season and species. Birds start arriving here usually by the middle of November and stay till April, the following year, even after completing their breeding. The species seen nesting during 1963-64, 1964-65, 1967-68 and 1968-69 nesting seasons were: Night Heron, Little Egret, Cattle Egret and Painted Stork. Local people say that Spotbilled or Grey Pelicans were also nesting in large numbers on the large tamarind trees on the banks of the tank, till they were felled ten years back. I have seen these pelicans nesting in Moondraippu some 25 miles away on the Madras-Kanyakumari Highway. I had counted the nests on 11th and 18.ii-1968 with the help of the residents, from roof-tops and stairs of houses. Though it appeared that there might not be more than 500 nests in all the actual counting turned out to be

| | |
|---------------|------------|
| Night Heron | 366 nests |
| Little Egret | 244 " |
| Cattle Egret | 218 " |
| Painted Stork | 156 " |
| Total | <u>984</u> |

The nests were very close and were actually running into one another, and one wondered how mixing up of chicks was being avoided. Cormorants, Spoonbills, and Spotbilled or Grey Pelicans were observed feeding in the tank, but these species did not stay during the night within the village.

Host trees. Nests were built on all available trees within the village and adjacent fields. During 1967-68, the following trees were used: Azadiracta indica (34 trees), Poinciana elata (15), Tamarindus indica (3), Coconut (1),

and peepal (1). Though there were Palmyra Palms close to the village no nests were found on them. This may be due to the disturbance caused by the tappers, collecting the palm sap. The trunks and branches of all the host trees were almost white with the birds' droppings. In the centre of the village even leaves of neem trees were completely covered with bird excreta, as if they were white washed. Birds which arrive early (order of arrival: night herons, cattle egrets, little egrets, painted stork) start building on the trees in the compounds of houses in the heart of the village. Their activities first spread over to the four 'Car Streets', then beyond gradually to the close by fields. The painted storks were found to nest only in the tree fringes of the village.

Nest and material. Nests are shallow stick platforms without any lining except for some green twigs with leaves used in the final stage of construction. Material for nesting was collected from faggots, fences and bushes. The host trees were avoided, though they contained dead branches. Painted Storks were found to carry sticks as long as 3 feet and one was seen wrenching a branch of Balsomodendron berrii from a fence. Twigs and sticks were brought from places 3-5 miles away. An examination of nest material showed that nearly half of the twigs were thorny; the number of sticks in each nest ranged between 324 and 387.

Food. Koonthakulam and other tanks in the neighbourhood provide a large quantity of food required to satiate the appetite of the young. Rainfall is about 25 inches and the inundated shallow lands and sheets of water formed during July-August rains contain considerable quantity of fry. During March-April, the birds bring fish from the Arabian Sea which is 20 miles away. The regurgitated food often falls down and sea fish is noticed only during late March and April, when the tanks and water-logged flats are dry. Painted Storks were observed to have brought the grey water snakes, which generally squirm and fall out of the nests.

Predators. Among predators were, the House Crow, the Jungle Crow and the Brahminy Kite and Pariah Kite. The kites removed nestlings and the regurgitated food fallen out of the nests. The crows were pestering the birds on the nest carrying away eggs, fledgelings and the regurgitated food. House cats also account for some casualties among the young.

Painted Storks : Wetting and courtship. During noon when it is hot, the Painted Storks were observed to bring water from the nearby water sources and throw over the young frequently (once 4 times between 12.00 and 13.20 hours). These birds mated on the nests with the female standing.

When night herons arrived and sat on their nests with food, they bowed displaying three erected white plumes on their head. It appeared that after this behaviour only the nestlings responded coming forward noisily with gaping mouths.

Guano. The fertilising property of the birds' droppings is well used by the villagers. Periodically basketfuls of the excreta are collected from beneath the nests and used as manure mostly in vegetable gardens.

How to reach the place. Buses are available from Naguneri twice daily. Buses plying to Karaiandi, via Mulakkaraipatti only touch Koonthakulam. There is no rest house or hotel to stay in Koonthakulam. But people are very hospitable, especially to a bird lover.

I have to be thankful to Mr R. Subbaraja Reddiar, President, Koonthakulam Panchayat and his son-in-law Mr Ramsubbu for their kind hospitality, and also to the other residents who admitted me into their homes and helped me in many ways.

BIRDING NEAR OOTY

D. A. Stairmand

I spent one week in Ootacamund from 13th-20th January this year and although perhaps my birding achievements were modest I did my own thing, was very satisfied and thoroughly enjoyed every day. I think that to enjoy birding in the manner and way it suits each individual best is the essence of birdwatching. It is a sure guarantee that one will go birding more and more and thereby increase one's experience and knowledge. That surely is the object of the exercise. Of the birding I did during that week in Ooty I would like to mention here just one or two occasions.

I had been in Ooty for five days when I decided to take a trip to Kotagiri and as I left Ooty at daybreak it was chilly and all car windows were closed for warmth. As the car slowly climbed through a shola just outside Ooty a Grey Junglecock (Gallus sonneratii) in magnificent condition paused momentarily in the middle of the road, before running for cover at a good speed. This was a lovely sight and a fine start to the day. About three miles further on I left the vehicle and walked a little way into a shola and stood stock still to listen for evidence of bird life. I heard various calls and within minutes I was thrilled to watch a party of birds - Nilgiri Blackbirds were hopping around on the ground flicking over leaves, while parties of Slatyheaded Scimitar Babblers (Pomatorhinus horsfieldii) - of the mellow bubbling notes - and Nilgiri Rufousbreasted Laughing Thrushes (Trochalopteron cachinnans) - of the weird but amusing laughs - flew, not too adroitly, short distances from tree to tree searching for food. A delightful male Velvetfronted Nuthatch (Sitta frontalis) appeared on a tree very close by and was soon joined by his mate. The female lacks the black stripe above and behind the eye but both birds were most attractive in their shades of purplish blue and greyish lilac set off to perfection by velvety black

Foreheads and coral coloured bills. They scuttled along the boughs and down the trunk of the tree; head-first if it suited them. While probing into one crevice five moths flew out and the nuthatch was able to catch one. The nuthatches stayed for several minutes and then passed a little further on with other members of this mixed hunting party, to be superseded on this tree by a typical and lovely blue flycatcher - I think it was a Nilgiri Verditer Flycatcher. Forming a background to these birds were White-eyes (indeed they formed a foreground too as some were low down only about six feet in front of me) and Grey Tits. Both the Grey Tits and the White-eyes were very common wherever I went while in Ooty and I cannot imagine any birdwatcher having a dull moment when these charming birds are around. I also noticed - but did not recognize - some modestly clad warblers and at least one woodpecker tapped and laughed away but, as on previous days, completely eluded me even when obviously close by. Then the bird party had gone but a troop of the much persecuted, warvy Nilgiri Langurs (Presbytis johni) were eating in trees and these langurs were lovely to look at with their long tails, yellowish brown faces and glossy black coats. Then the leader of the troop looked at me - I thought menacingly - so I moved off and left them in peace with pleasant memories of their beauty and whooping calls.

In the evening I again passed through this shola and was pleased to see a covey of Painted Bush Quail (Perdica erythrorhynchum) on rocks on a small waterfall. There were nine birds in this covey and all except two soon sought cover amongst the rocks. These two remained on view for several more minutes and obviously gave the impression to the rest of the covey that all was clear so the other seven trooped out and I was treated to a view of the full covey again; but not for long! Very close to this waterfall a Greyheaded Flycatcher (Culicicapa ceylonensis) was launching forth from a tree on short sallies and delighted me with its constant pretty little whistling song. These birds were common around Ooty and immediately became one of my favourites. Again in this area were White-eyes, Grey Tits, Scimitar Babblers, Rufousbreasted Laughing Thrushes and, this time, Small Green Barbets, Grey Drongos and quite colourful Willow Warblers. A little further on at last I had success with the 'laughing' woodpeckers that had mocked me for so long and they were a joy to see. There were three of them -- two males and one female -- flying onto a tree and then working up the trunk and laughing loudly at each other and the world. They looked like magnificent versions of the handsome Goldenbacked Woodpecker (Dinopium benghalense). As they scuttled up trunks and moved noisily around in the trees I noted their details carefully and after consulting Ind. Handbook Vol. 4 on my return to Bombay I was able to identify them as Larger

Goldenbacked Woodpeckers (Chrysocolaptes lucidus). The Handbook states that these birds are very agile in dodging behind tree-trunks to escape observation. Having had success only on my fifth day I fully agree. That day I had hoped to see the magnificent 19 inch long Great Black Woodpecker (Dryocopus javensis) on coffee plantations below Kotagiri but I had no luck there. So these Larger Goldenbacked Woodpeckers provide much consolation.

One afternoon at a shola near Lovedale I had again watched a party of Nilgiri Langurs and was sitting under a tree (and, incidentally, under a large bird-of-prey - which was sitting high up above me in this tree to which it had flown) looking across a tiny stream when I noticed that glorious little bird the male Black-and-Orange Flycatcher (Ochromela nigrorufa). He was on an horizontal branch of a tree about 12 feet above the ground and shafts of sunlight were filtering through and shining on the running water, trees and ground. As he flitted around in these surroundings and descended to the ground to pick up insects an immature male Paradise Flycatcher (Terpsiphone paradisi) with chestnut streamers flowing and a Greyheaded Flycatcher, moving gracefully in short loops and whistling away, came into view. It was a scene of great beauty. At one stage a Small Green Barbet started to call but halfway through its third pucok it was interrupted by a raucous laugh from a Laughing Thrush and instead of a train of pucoks being set up there was deafening silence and this added a touch of humour to the afternoon.

There was another afternoon when I got some good exercise in glorious weather and lovely surroundings by walking across Wenlock Downs when, from a birdwatcher's point of view, the highlight was that handsome little falcon, the Kestrel. I think kestrels are best to watch in flight when a strong wind is blowing, as on that afternoon. Sometimes the kestrels were perched on stones or mounds and I found that they did not fly away until I had got quite close to them. I suppose that this might have been an indication that they had experienced little disturbance from people. Usually there was at least one kestrel in the air, to be seen perfectly with the aid of binoculars, quartering its feeding territory and then occasionally hovering in mid-air ready to pounce on its prey. These kestrels did have success on several occasions but I was not able to distinguish what they had caught. As I walked the Downs in perfect peace I set-up Nilgiri Pipits (Anthus nilghiriensis) and probably other pipits as well, and in a wettish part at the bottom of a slope, a few snipe were flushed and it always gives me a thrill (and slight shock) when I inadvertently flush snipe.

During the time I spent in Ooty I was a little surprised that whereas Redwhiskered Bulbuls were particularly common I saw far less of the Black Bulbul that I had expected. I

they have stopped coming due to lack of food in the area which recently suffered from a cyclone. Heavy commercial fishing is going on which may have affected their food supply. It was a great disappointment for me as I had planned to do some serious photography there. Bird photography is my hobby, and I exhibit my bird photographs in the photographic saloons in India and abroad. I am interested in birdwatching also. . . .

The letter does not call for any elaborate comment. If it is true that the pelicans did not nest in the area in 1968, 1969 and 1970, the chances of their returning of their own accord in 1971 or later are very very remote.

Does it mean that we have heard the last of this once flourishing pelicanry? I hope not.

I do not know whether commercial fishing was intensified after 1960 when I last visited the pelicanry. Unless such intensification has resulted in a deliberate campaign against the pelican, it could not have been a major factor in the birds' disappearance. The pelicans could have caught all the fish they and their young required from areas that would not interest the fishing trade.

If it is true that the birds have been forced to desert their traditional nesting places, the cause is likely to have been large-scale depredation by man. This would not have happened if the authorities had implemented the very modest proposals I had placed before them for the preservation of this splendid pelicanry.

CONFRONTATION AMONG KOELS

Zafar Futehally

On the morning of 22nd July I heard the usual calls of a male Koel from a mango tree adjoining my house. On looking out of the window I noticed two male koels facing each other in a most threatening manner. Their blood red eyes added to the ferocity of the scene. The kuoo-kuoo calls of one were immediately answered by the opponent; sometimes both the birds called sharply kee-kik-kik, kee-kik-kik. I must have watched the scene for 20 minutes. The position of the birds on the branch was practically unchanged for the first ten minutes or so. Then the battle was joined, and on two occasions the birds flew at each other in a vicious way. Soon a ring of crows took their positions in the box seats and after a while the contenders flew away. On the evening of the next day I saw two koels again on our Peltophorum tree (I presume they were the same birds) behaving in the same manner. Obviously the birds are strongly territorial and resent intrusion by other of their kind in their domain.

THE RAINS AND BIRDLIFE AROUND BOMBAY

J. S. Serrao

The vagaries of the rains this year appear to have hit the routine life of some of our birds around Bombay. This impression I received during a birdwatching excursion in the Borivli National Park on 11.vii.1971. A comparison of the day's notes with those made in the area on 21.vi and 12.vii in 1970, a year of good rainfall, tends to confirm this impression. The total rainfall up to 11.vii.1971 is c. 1178 mm against 1453 mm for the corresponding period in 1970.

The streams which were gushing torrents in 1970 were mere trickles as late as 11.vii.1971. As a result a birdwatcher missed the whistlings of the Whistling Schoolboy (Myiophonus horsfieldii). Last monsoon the bird's startlingly human whistles could be heard coming up from the valley below the Car Park as early as 21.vi. The water conditions prevailing seem not to be to his liking this monsoon. The bird must be silently biding its time for the rains to pick up before it ventures on raising a family.

He will beat you of the Spotted Babbler (Pellorneum ruficeps) greeted one's ear last year as early as 21.vi around the Car Park. But nowhere up to the Caves was it audible on 11.vii.1971. As if to compensate for lack of its sweet notes, an individual flew up from the valley below as we neared the junction of the road leading to the Caves, and settled in front of our transport. It reluctantly took off when we were almost upon it.

Nowhere could the Drongo Cuckoo (Surniculus lugubris) be hear or seen. Last year about this time one could see it whistling away its 1-2-3-4.... from perches on roadside trees all along the Park road. The brain-fever calls of the Common Hawk-Cuckoo (Cuculus varius), which true to description appeared 'obstreperous and aggravating' when heard all over the place last year, were heard only at one spot on 11.vii.1971. But the cross-word-puzzle of the Indian Cuckoo (Cuculus micropterus) was conspicuously missing, though it was a common sound this time last year.

Three individuals (two together and a solo) of Blyth's or Whiteheaded Myna were seen, though the Greyheaded form, so common in the Park last year, was totally missed.

The highlights of the day's birdwatching were:

(1) A Swallow-Shrike (Artamus fuscus) demonstrated its mode of bathing in a drizzle. Sitting on an overhead wire, the bird opened out its wings full-stretch horizontally to the body, and with feathers fluffed turned and twisted on its perch presenting its back to the direction of the drizzle. Occasionally it dipped its anterior at a deep angle to the ground below so as to attain an almost head down posture on the perch.

(2) What we made out to be a Whitebellied Drongo (Dicrurus caerulescens) flew up from the jungle below and perched on the overhead wire passing across the top of the hill. An exposed perch of the nature appeared rather unusual for the habits of a Whitebellied Drongo. As we stood glassing it and doubting the identification, the bird, as if to confirm, shot itself up in the air from its perch, and having reached its climax volplaned back to it. In so doing it exposed to full view its white belly.

BIRD NOTES FROM THE NILGIRIS

Sarah Jameson

I have been very lucky on this visit to Coonoor. Not only have I seen and heard the Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters (Merops leschenaulti) and the Common Iora (Aegithina tiphia) in our garden over a period of two months so far, but I have now seen a third bird who should not be here! On 9th June I heard a song I had never heard before, and then again the next day. I rushed out with my binoculars, and by great good fortune traced it to a tree on the steep slope at the edge of the garden leading into Forest land. The bird was sitting on a branch slightly below the level at which I was standing. I had a very good, close view of it in full sun, and recognised it as a male Blackheaded Cuckoo-Shrike (Coracina melanoptera sykesi). I had just reached that chapter in my annual reading of Salim Ali's Birds of Kerala. The bird was about bulbul size, with a completely black head and neck, and black 'bib' like a Magpie-Robin's. Upper plumage silvery grey, with black wings and tail, and white below. As the bird was singing while I was observing it, I could see that the mouth was reddish pink. Salim Ali writes: 'Low country, but locally up to 3500 ft .. all India south and east of a line from Mount Abu through Sambhar (Rajasthan) to Bareilly.' With the approach of its breeding season, the male delivers a short, clear and pretty whistling song of several notes ending in a quick-repeated pit-pit-pit. Nesting; season March to May.' The song of this particular bird always began with Pit-pitee, a slight pause, then what might be interpreted by tooe-tooe-tooe-tooe-tooe repeated rapidly; the tone quality rather like that of a Redwhiskered Bulbul.

I heard the song on 9.vi and 10.vi, but have never heard it here before. If the song is only delivered during the breeding season, it would be interesting to know whether they sometimes breed at this height (almost 6000 ft), or whether this individual was blown up here from the plains by the violent gales we have been having!

OWLETS: How Swamiji Shri Japanandji of Shree Ramkrishna Mission at Abu was saved from confrontation with a tiger on the banks of the Narbada

Sursinhji Jadeja

On Mt Abu I often meet two people who are lovers of Nature and everything connection with this fascinating awe inspiring chapter pertaining to life.

Swamiji Shree told me that a few years ago while he was travelling on foot on the bank of the hold Narbada river in Gujarat, the part of the trail passed through dense thick jungle. Swamiji had been warned by various people not to risk the journey through the jungle late in the evenings or in the very early mornings, because the jungle was alive with tigers and panthers. But Swamiji, an ardent lover of God, disregarded this warning and started walking irrespective of whether it was light or dark. After a short distance he came across a branch of a big banyan tree that was overhanging the trail, which meant that he would be forced to stoop, bend low, get under the branch and then continue his walk on the other side.

Just as he was about to get under that branch, he noticed that seven owlets (locally known as Chibbir birds) were seated close to each other on that low branch overhanging the trail. Swamiji hadn't the heart to disturb them. So he just stood there watching those cute little imps conversing with each other sitting on the branch. They went on nodding at each other and appeared very wise; they also nodded at Swamiji and tried to convey to him to be on the alert. This little wise nodding lasted for four or five minutes and then all the seven flew away into the forest.

The Swamiji who had been terribly fascinated by this little interlude then bent low under the branch from where the trail descended to the level of the Narbada flow. He then saw a little further on the trail itself the fresh steaming dung of a tiger who must have come to drink from the river and left a little earlier. Had the Swamiji not waited to watch the seven little owlets and seen their nodding pranks, both the Swamiji and the tiger would have been simultaneously on the spot on the bank of the Narbada saying 'Good Morning' to each other. Swamiji still thinks that those seven owlets were Saptarishis (seven sages of the ancients who saved him having that tragic confrontation with the tiger).

[This note was received in May 1969 and had got buried under less important papers. - Ed.]

NOTES & COMMENTS

Mr D. A. Stairmand who is touring India at a rather fast pace wrote a few days back from Mysore complaining that even at this time of the year Quail are served in the hotes. The Editor wrote to the Chief Conservator of Forests, Bangalore, to find out whether there is a law against the commercial exploitation of these birds. The CCF says that no law has yet been brought into force but that some moves are contemplated. Let us hope that the Act will be based on lines which exist in Maharashtra to prevent serving of Game Birds in restaurants. Will members in Mysore, Mr K. D. Ghorpade, for example, please take up this matter with the authorities and pursue it to a successful conclusion.

After finishing with Mysore, Mr Stairmand has written from Srinagar complaining about certain aspects of the administration of the Dachigaon Sanctuary. The matter has been taken up with the Chief Wildlife Warden.

* * * *

Towards the end of May, the Editor happened to be near Mandva harbour in the Kolaba District, Maharashtra. Surprisingly on a tree in the compound of a residence by the sea a number of Common Bayas were busy making nests. There must have been at least 30 nests hanging from the tree, many of them almost complete. Both males and females were around. On inquiring from the local people it was learnt that these birds very often nest in May in that locality. Have any readers cross Bayas nesting outside the monsoon months?

CORRESPONDENCE

' Birds of Jamshedpur '

In the June Newsletter there is an article by Mr Narayana Swami on the Birds of Jamshedpur, with a query at the end about the breeding plumage of the Purple Sunbird. As Disergarh, W. Bengal, is only about 4 hours away from Jamshedpur by road, the writer might be interested to hear about our resident Purple Sunbirds. As it happens, I have all my bird notes with me, including the Newsletter for Birdwatchers Vol. 10(3), March 1970, in which you published my month by month notes on the Purple Sunbird.

Whistler writes: 'The breeding season varies a good deal according to locality and in different parts of India eggs may be found from January to August; most nests, will, however, be found in April and May. There are at least two broods, and these are reared in rapid succession, sometimes even from the same nest.'

If I may have your permission to quote from y previous article, I would like to give extracts specifically dealing with the change of plumage.

'Whistler writes that the winter plumage is assumed from about September to December..... January. Saw a male very close .. the full midday sun bringing out the most gorgeous metallic greenish purple sheens all over its body.....August. Seen three different pairs in garden. Males very a lot in tidiness and broadness of dark stripe from chin to abdomen... October. One male getting very mottled. November. Have noticed colour change varies tremendously just among the birds in our garden. Nov. 12th. Saw a male with a lot of black over his yellow breast. 21st. Saw male entirely black. 26th. Saw male which had lost nearly all his yellow colouring. 30th. Saw a male entirely black. 30th. Saw another male very mottled though head and neck glistening. December. On 8th saw a male black except for tiny yellowish patch under root of tail. Two yards further along the same wire saw another male not changed at all. 16th. Saw a male who hasnt even begun to change colour. '

Mr Narayana Swami's second question asks why a crow chases a Pariah Kite whenever it flies low. Judging by my observations on the resident Pariah Kite family in the big old eucalyptus tree here in Coonoor, I should imagine it is partly because they are both scavengers and after the same sort of food, and partly because the kite has a taste for crow babies, and the crow chases it in annoyance for present or past thefts, or contemplated thefts of the future! It is obvious here that the crows have no love for the kites.

Mrs Sarah Jameson
Culmore, Coonoor, Nilgiris

The Monal Pheasant

The Monal (Lophophorus impejanus) is one of the most beautiful and somewhat rare winged creature of Himachal Pradesh, so that of India. But unfortunately people of the area are destroyin g this national wealth by unnecessary killing just for collecting its crown feathers for the purpose of decoration, used in the cap as a crown. People particularly of district of Kulu, Lahaul and some portion of Kinnaur got very much affection to use this crown feather; it is rather a matter of prestige issue. In spite of sincere efforts of the wildlife people this practice is still continuing. as a result of which these rare birds are facing extinction. A living pair of Monal is offered up to \$75, but instead of making a good deal people are destroying it only for their meaningless vanity. The only way to prevent this mass killing , nature lovers should bring pressurẽ on the Government of India through the

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

August 1971

Board for Wildlife, and impose a ban on the use of such feathers for decoration.

R. N. Mukherjee
The Nest, Saproon, Simla Hills

News for Bird Enthusiasts

The Indian National Appeal of the World Wildlife Fund has taken over stocks of the book About Indian Birds, by Salim Ali and Lacey Futehally.

The INA is reselling the book at the nominal price of Rs1/- per copy. Readers who would like to purchase are requested to write to the World Wildlife - India, c/o Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, Prince of Wales Museum Compound, Bombay 1. The book will be sent by V.P.P.

Shama Futehally

Zafar Futehally
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers
32-A Juhu Lane
Andheri, Bombay 58-AS

EDITORIAL BOARD :

Dr. Salim Ali,
Bombay.

Mrs. Jamal Ara,
Ranchi.

Dr. Biswamoy Biswas,
Calcutta.

Kunvar Shri Lavkumar,
Rajkot.

Prof. K. K. Neelakantan,
Trivandrum.

Mr. B. R. Grubh,
Bombay.

Mr. R. L. Fleming, Junior,
Kathmandu, Nepal.

Mr. D. A. Stairmand,
Bombay.

Br. A. Navarro,
Bombay.

Editor :

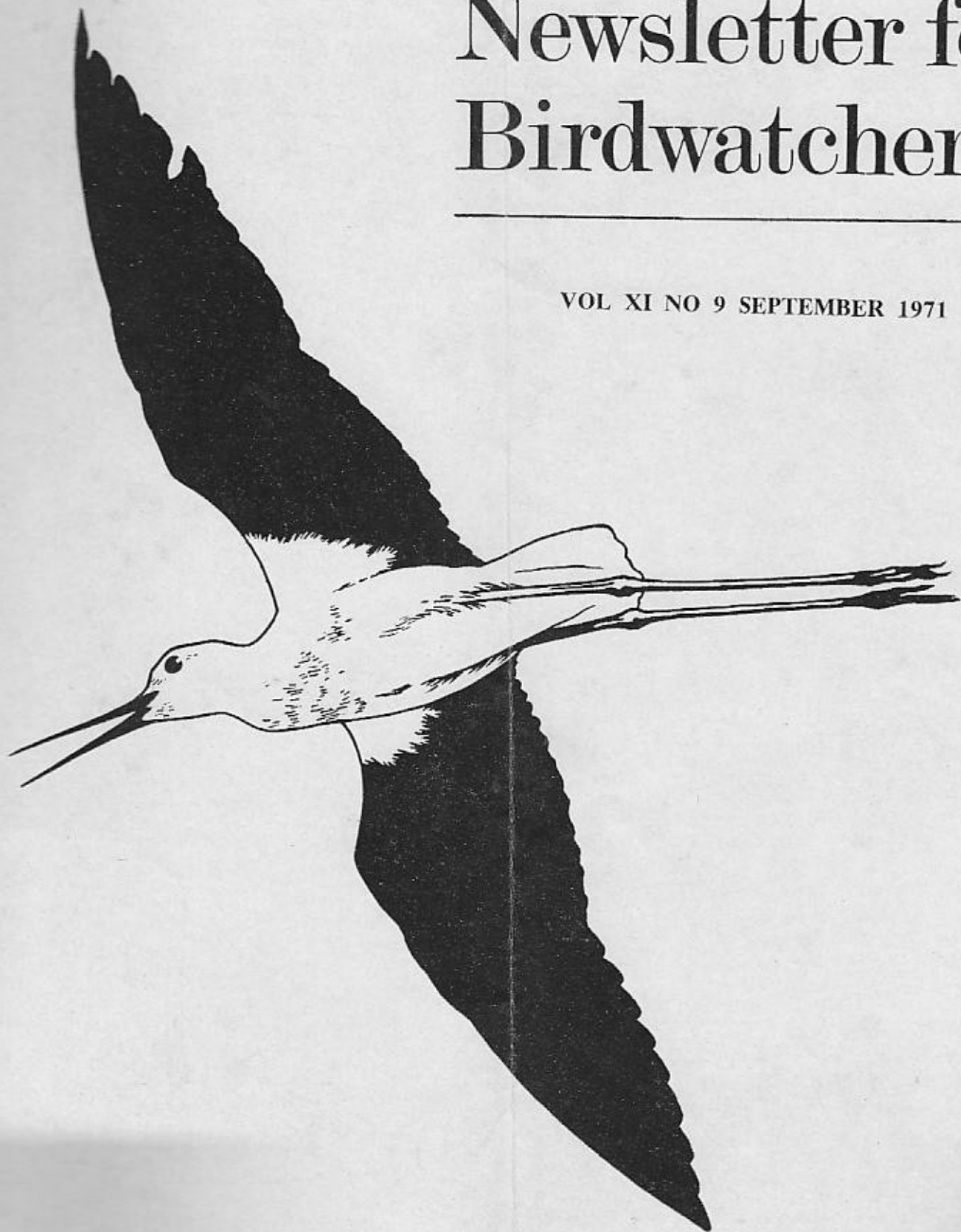
Mr. Zafar Futehally,
32A, Juhu Lane, Andheri,
Bombay-58 AS.

Annual Subscription Rs. 10/-.

Students Rs. 5/-.

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

VOL XI NO 9 SEPTEMBER 1971



NEWSLETTER FOR
BIRDPWATCHERS

Volume 11, Number 9

September 1971

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Birdwatching on Malabar Hill, by Neela D'Souza | 1 |
| A summer week-end in Khandala, by D. A. Stairmand | 5 |
| A few birds at Dighe, by Ananta Mitra | 9 |
| Whitebreasted Waterhen, by Zafar Futehally | 10 |
| Notes and Comments | 11 |
| Correspondence | 11 |
| Regarding <u>Newsletter for Birdwatchers</u> , from Lee M. Talbot | |

BIRDPWATCHING ON MALABAR HILL

Neela D'Souza

The birdman appeared this morning after a long while. I hastened to the Gardens for a close look at his pet; Meena had investigated earlier and reported the bird had webbed feet. Salim Ali didn't help the identification process as there was no bird listed of that size, with webbed feet and that could run so fast. And then the birdman didn't show up for several weeks leaving me no nearer solving the puzzle. So when I heard that ringing, unmistakable call I looked out of the window and went to the Gardens as fast as I could.

The Hanging Gardens on Malabar Hill attract a number of health and fresh air fiends who dutifully stride their requisite number of times around its circumference. There are infants and children and teen-agers accompanying grown-ups. There are dogs that frisk around the flower beds and lope obediently after athletic masters. And there is this bird.

It turned out to be a partridge - why had Meena chosen to give it webbed feet? Out of pique, perhaps, as the man had prevented her coming close on the pretence the bird would attack. The man brings it for a walk as partridges seem to need a daily constitutional. It runs swiftly behind its keeper and occasionally if it stops to investigate an unwary worm or perches on top of a hedge, he calls out and it answers--clear, musical and loud. Meantime he is getting his work-out too and after half-an-hour divests himself of his shirt and proceeds to finish.

~~Some years ago a friend in Aurangabad told me a story I was~~

then inclined to disbelieve. Driving home in a hurry he was stopped near one of the city gates. The urgency with which his car was flagged suggested that somebody decidedly important - and all important people visit Aurangabad en route to Ajanta - was about to use the road. My friend slammed on the brakes and the Aurangabadi who had waved his arms so urgently ran up to explain that his quail was taking a walk and would he be kind enough to wait till it had crossed the road? Now I could probably swop my Hanging Gardens partridge story with him.

Some weeks ago, before the rains, a fantail pigeon wandered into the courtyard of our house. We couldn't begin to guess where it had come from or why it had chosen to visit our place. It didn't seem hurt and was reasonably friendly, approaching close and strutting all over the house although it fled if you went after it. It stayed on and at night perched on top of the budgerigars' cage. It was a companionable sort, especially when rice was being cleaned in the courtyard and made itself quite at home. A few evenings later it wandered out of the front door and was intrigued by the children playing cricket. They reported that it flew up on top of the garage at dusk. But when I went looking for it there wasn't a trace; it didn't return the next day or the day after. It left as mysteriously as it had come.

Yes, this was supposed to be a birdwatcher on Malabar Hill - but there are birds and birds . . .

Our garden wakes up every morning with the Redwhiskered Bulbul who goes his cheerful circuit around the house. As I lie awake in the early morning, listening to bird chatter, the steel and concrete of the city seem very far away. I seldom hear the bulbul after breakfast but occasionally he is back in the afternoon. For some reason he shuns the Hanging Gardens and prefers the informal privacy of our lawn. The barbet does not come into our compound but the trees across the wall resound with his persistent note through the day. We have flocks of spotted munias occasionally; a regular visitor is the tailor bird who shatters the quiet with his loud chatter. You wouldn't dream all that noise came from that dainty body.

Sunbirds come in pairs, singing their way from exora to sunflower and through the pumpkin and brinjal patches on the side of the house. You can trace their progress through our garden and over the wall to the Hanging Gardens. There was one morning, just once, when a rufous-backed shrike perched on my window, so close that I could easily see the black line emphasizing his eyes and his delicate rust and white colouring. The extravagant colouring and shrill scolding of roseringed and blossomheaded parakeets among the sunflowers is another vivid two-dimensional memory.

The most rewarding place to go birdwatching on Malabar Hill is the Raj Bhavan estate. Permit holders have the privilege of a sandy beach with a sea calmed and gentled by breakwaters.

Walking to the beach on a Sunday morning in May is a delight. There is one gulmohur which is poised almost theatrically against the clear sky in a lovely play of orange against blue. The laburnum seems more golden here than anywhere else. The fantail flycatcher welcomes your arrival in song and entertains you as you walk along, keeping just a hop, step and jump ahead. When we lived in this estate years ago, I listened for the koel every year and rejoiced when he began to call in mid March. He still frequents Raj Bhavan; the female lurks silently in the bushes, occasionally rushing out in a whirl of wings.

The bulbuls shun the estate though they seem quite fond of my garden which is not too far away. I have noticed this through the years. The sunbirds, koel, fly over Malabar Hill impartially but not the bulbuls!

One year a pair of hornbill nested down the road, some distance from the beach. We watched their clumsy antics, listened to their cackling and agreed that they were remarkably like a pair of clowns. They never came back to nest but we do see and hear them sometimes when we go to the beach.

The bee-eater fancies the trees in one particular stretch of the beach - is it because the hunting is more rewarding here? I explore this corner hopefully myself each time I am there; a friend once caught a baby turtle here and took it home in triumph. Turtles come up from the sea (shades of Galapagos!) to lay their eggs here and though I have seen their tracks and once even found an egg - alas, no baby turtle! The bee-eaters dart around in profusion near this spot, startling the sunlight with bright grass-green wings, outlined like miniature kites as they glide back to their perches.

There are little crabs here scurrying sideways on the sand, darting suddenly for cover - are these what the kingfisher fancies? For the common kingfisher - but what is common about that brilliant blue and that emphatic beak? - finds the beach profitable too. When we row out sometimes on a quiet morning, the fishermen around, quite close to the beach. They sit in their boats, patient, floppy hats shadowing their faces, their small boats rocking gently in the swell. Each has an attendant gull perched in the water, waiting equally patiently.

And as we return home in the late afternoon, the magpie-robin who frequents the drive sings especially for us, his white-fringed tail keeping time to his song.

The peacocks are seldom to be seen now in the estate. I remember with nostalgia June mornings a few years ago when there were several, in full feather just before the rains. Around a bend in the road you came across them in many-splendoured array, tails iridescent in the dappled light, courting the quiet, drab females. They were so tame that when you drove past they stepped aside without bothering to close their tails and continued to display. On Carmichael Road you still see them; there was one that even walked into

my pantry and surprised me in the midst of cake-making! But where we live now, between the Hanging Gardens and the Tower of Silence, there is only the shrill cry at night jarring you into wakefulness.

Going through the above note J. S. Serrao writes as under:

The note adds four species to the list published in 1942 by Rt Rev. R. D. Acland, Bishop of Bombay in the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society, Vol. 43: 525-9. The additions are: Rufousbacked Shrike, Blossomheaded Parakeet, nesting hornbills and the Common Kingfisher. His Excellency had listed about 40 species of birds visiting his garden at Bishop's Lodge, Malabar Hill, under the title 'The Birds of a Bombay garden'. He tells us of the Indian Robin and the Indian Oriole which were present in his garden in the 40s -- the Indian Robin must have now left the area completely. The Grey- and White Wagtails were regular cold season visitors up to 1941, but in 1942 he was looked up but once or twice by a Grey- and not at all by any White Wagtail. He found the Purple Sunbird to be a remiss which he glimpsed but once, though the Purple-rumped was commoner. Other rarities in the list include the Paradise Flycatchers and the Pied Crested Cuckoo.

Among Rt Rev. Acland's 'Most Honoured Visitors' were: White-eyes in January 1942, which bird E. H. Aitken (EHA) never saw on the Malabar Hill in his time, were seen by Dr Salim Ali in the Government House Grounds (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 40: 158); the Whitebellied Drongo which made a series of late evening visits in December 1941, and the Indian Shikra, a common bird on Malabar Hill in EHA's time, visited him once in January 1942. Since EHA the shikra was met on Malabar Hill only once - a female taken by W. S. Millard on 9.i.1919. A Peregrine Falcon (Falco peregrinus peregrinus) also visited him one, and three Large Cuckoo Shrikes, a frequent bird in EHA's day visited the garden in January and in March 1942.

Malabar Hill also happens to be the venue of a new record for Bombay: an Indian Button Quail (wild and not captive) which flew into Naaz Restaurant on 23.v.1949 at c. 10 p.m. during heavy showers accompanied by lightning and thunder (Doris Ferreira, J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 48: 808-9).

Destruction of habitat since the forties must have displaced many of the birds listed by Rt Rev. Acland, and careful notes made in the area by members of the Birdwatchers Club would be useful in studying the changes that have resulted in the birdlife of the area in the wake of this destruction in the name of 'progress'. -- Ed.7

A SUMMER WEEK-END IN KHANDALA

D. A. Stairmand

I arrived at the hotel in which I always stay in Khandala in time for tea on Saturday 24th April. It had been a hot 2½ hours drive from Bombay with a few birds to be seen at that time of the year.

As I settled down to tea on my Hotel room balcony there were Redwhiskered and Redvented Bulbuls, Jungle Mynas and a Coppersmith in the Hotel's compound. I was told by the young bearer that the pair of Redvented Bulbuls that had nested in an Hibiscus in the compound had reared their two young successfully and these had flown from nest the previous day. The Hotel is over ½ mile off the road and the main trees in the compound are jambool (Syzygium cumini), mango, casuarinas and gul mohurs while there is a variety of shrubs.

By 4.30 p.m. it was cooling off and I went down to the roadside tank where I saw a Large Pied Wagtail, Paddy Birds attaining handsome summer dress, Redwattled Lapwings and Wiretailed Swallows, the latter's steel blue upperparts shone beautifully in the sun as they banked over the water. Three Dabchicks were hiding from view amongst vegetation on the tank. A pair of Dabchicks had brought up three successive broods on this tank between August-December last year. The usual Common Kingfisher was not there but its absence was compensated by the sight of a Greyheaded Yellow Wagtail in glorious plumage.

I spent that evening walking near and along a quite well-wooded and very well-covered stream below the hotel. The outstanding trees there were siris (Albizia lebbek), kusim (Schleichera oleosa) and wild figs (Ficus sp.). All held attraction for the birds as the kusims were in full green leaf -- having just changed from red -- and had some spikes of yellowish flowers, the siris were in flower and the Ficus in ripe fig, many of which had fallen to the ground. It is usually a quiet fairly undisturbed area and the 'thrushes' had just returned there, presumably from the forest below, a couple of weeks or so before. That evening I saw many Blackcapped Blackbirds (Turdus merula nigropileus), one Whitethroated Ground Thrush (Zoothera citrina cyanotus), bulbuls, Jungle Babblers, Whitebreasted Kingfishers, Jungle Mynas, Magpie Robins, a Drongo, a female Golden Oriole and Spotted Doves. I could watch only one Blackbird as the others were shy and flew up into trees or away on my approach. The one Blackbird I watched was under a tree away from the stream flicking over dry leaves in typical thrush style. I had perfect views of Small Green Barbets, Coppersmiths and pairs of Common Ioras. The males of the last named were glorious at that time of the year with rich yellow fronts and what looks like a black cap but the black, in fact, extends over much of the upperparts. The Iora is not shy and if a pair are heard calling

to each other from nearby trees it is merely a matter of minutes before they come into view acrobatically 'working' the trees for insects. They have a variety of calls, uttered almost constantly such as short whistles; a harsh chrrr chrrr; a plaintive pee-oo and the well-known shoubeegi from which their local name is derived. On a telegraph wire near the stream was a Common Green Bee-eater with its tail broadened out. Surely this was part of its breeding display. A fairly quiet afternoon and evening's birding but, then, the Symphony of Khandala always opens slowly. Mine is not, of course, the Khandala of the ornithologists (I've been down into the forest only 3-4 times and then missed practically everything that, presumably, was there) but I love the area near the Hotel and I know it fairly well by now. At dusk a Whitethroated Ground Thrush sang near my room -- the first I'd heard since last July. As night fell there was a loud resounding chook - chook chook, chook - chook, etc. with an echo like the tuk tuk tuk of the Coppersmith. Can Br. Navarro identify this sound for me from these meagre notes? It is a common sound there just after dark.

I set my alarm for 5.15 a.m. Sunday 25.iv but there was no need for it as I woke at 5 a.m. to the wonderful sound of the song of a Whitethroated Ground Thrush singing just outside my room. At 6 a.m. I was on my way down to the stream but paused for several minutes to watch and listen to a Ground Thrush in two trees. The first bird I saw on the stream was a Spotted Babbler (Pellorneum ruficeps) which looks very thrush-like (and, indeed, why shouldn't it?). From 6 a.m. to 9 a.m. I had a glorious time at the covered, wooded stream and saw many birds. Here I shall mention only a few - several Golden Orioles, a pair of Goldfronted Chloropses -- and they were in glorious plumage - pairs of Ioras, one of the males was descending like a fluffy yellow ball in his wonderful breeding display, parties of Wood Shrikes - and Small Minivets - both male and female of the latter in about equal numbers, a mixed party of Black-headed Cuckoo-Shrikes chasing around very merrily, and, of course, the Blackbirds. I noticed pretty orchids in flower on trees and took some time to locate a Ground Thrush singing away in a magnificent kusim. As I moved closer to the kusim and then walked around under the tree still searching for the Ground Thrush on boughs or amongst foliage I thought that any second he would fly - but no, he just sang on and one even long after I had spotted him. He is a slightly stubby but handsome bird - a typical thrush look about it and coloured mainly blue above with yellowish brown head, neck and underparts. In the race cyanotus the sides of the face, chin and throat are white and there are two very distinct dark bands down the sides of the face. The female is often close by and she differs by having the upperparts suffused with olive-green. Also in this kusim were lovely Greyfronted Green Pigeons (Treron pompadora) resting contentedly. Earlier they had been

calling musically - ' a series of soft rich whistles up and down the scale ' (Handbook Vol. 3). Three times during the morning a Malabar Whistling Thrush (Myiophonus horsfieldii) had broken out into song and though this please me no end I found it slightly out of context. I love this song most during the SW. monsoon season at Khandala when the rain slackens momentarily, the mist swirls and the light brightens barely perceptibly and over the sound of water dripping from trees and the rush of streams comes the Whistling Schoolboy's song rising above all other sounds of nature with clarity and purity.

Back at the hotel for breakfast I saw a Brahminy Myna - with glossy black crown and long recumbent crest - on the Dining Room roof and a Jungle Crow flashed past chased by a female Golden Oriole, whom I suspect was nesting close by. This was the only crow I saw all week-end and birds such as House Sparrows near the roadside tank. The mango next to my room was loaded with fruit just about to ripen and Loten's Sunbird hovered in front of its leaves taking off grubs while Ioras and Leaf Warblers combed this tree.

Out again after breakfast I saw two Common Green Bee-eaters copulating on telegraph wires near the stream. A female Pied Bushchat and a Redvented Bulbul had bills full of food and they eyed me warily and wouldn't move anywhere near their nests for fear of betraying their young.

Atop a pylon near the stream and above the Old European Cemetery with the forest below was a large bird of prey. I made notes: ' Dark brown head; yellow cere and legs; brown above; lighter brown below; white patch on back of head. In flight slim tail, white bars on underwings; high-pitched screaming calls over forest . ' One or two things really mystified me - the white patch seen on the back of its head when the bird turned its head around while perched on the pylon. Also the much darker head than upperparts. Next evening at Hornbill House Mr Humayun Abdulali sorted out both problems and it most certainly had been a Crested Serpent Eagle (Spilornis cheela). I was shown one specimen with a dark brown head and lighter upperparts and the ' white patch ' on the back of the head had obviously been caused by the wind blowing the crest feathers. I had been unable to see the crest or, indeed, the white bar across the tail. In the Khandala old cemetery were a pair of adult Common Langurs and the mother had a babe-in-arms. A charming little fellow - body only about one foot long and the tail longer.

I had a sleep after Sunday lunch and was out again after tea when a Common Mongoose was seen on his usual 5 o'clock stroll near the Hotel room. I am on friendly terms with this mongoose and he has even had the courtesy to show me where he lives near the Hotel. A Ground Thrush sang high up in the nearest jambool against whose fresh, long slim green leaves a male Iora looked a picture.

I walked beyond the stream up an incline to an open stony area with scattered trees known as Powwalla Hill from where there is a lovely view, spoiled only by pylons, of the forest and the Duke's Nose. Here there were Rosefinches, Rufousbacked Shrikes, Indian Robins, Indian Pipits, several of one of the smaller Crested Larks and Bulbuls. It was a mellow evening and a troop of eight Common Langurs were romping around at play. About 200 yards further on five Bonnet Macaques were climbing pylons for fun. Here I must relate to you 'The Tragedy of Powwalla Hill' as told to me by my good friend the Hotel owner. A few years ago a certain Doctor from Bombay walking his dog on Powwalla Hill when the dog caught sight of a macaque and chased it. Tooth to tail they hurtled across the plateau with the monkey going at great speed towards the cliff when, a second or so from the precipice with the dog very hot on its trail (or tail), the monkey leapt up onto a pylon while the dog careened on and emulated the lemming. The moral of this story is that no dog should romp the Ghats country without a parachute.

Near the cliff's edge Dusky Crag Martins (Hirundo concolor) judged the length of my nose to a nicety and I always know when they are that close as I can clearly see the roundish white spots on their tail feathers. During the worst of the monsoon rains at Khandala these lovable, trusting, cheeky birds will sometimes rest on a window sill only 5 feet from my chair. They have almost as much difficulty walking as I would have flying.

I, of course, spent the evening by the stream again as I wanted to listen to the thrushes songs. From 6.15 p.m. to 7 p.m. a Whitethroated Ground Thrush sang from a bough of a wild fig above the stream (the female was close by) while I sat well tucked into a slope. The thrush often sang with its back towards me, when it was more difficult to see the bird. The sun rises late and descends early behind the hills surrounding Khandala so the light was good but not brilliant. A Red Spurfowl (Galloperdix spadicea) came down to drink but on its way up the opposite bank it saw me and raised its crest (as recorded by Humayun Abdulali and mentioned in Handbook Vol. 2) in excitement but dithered and dithered before making for cover. It was a lovely bird. A few minutes later I heard movement over dry leaves above and behind me and I sat tight expecting a Spurfowl or Quail. When it passed me I saw it was a lovely snake - yellow with good dark markings. Mr J. C. Daniel tells me it was probably a completely harmless Rat Snake. After all, we have only four poisonous snakes in this country and snakes are not natural enemies of man. Quite the reverse, in fact, Bird songs and calls brought the week-end to a charming close.

Due to the much welcomed lack of crows there were few calls to be heard from Koels. However, quite often a bird of the same family asked me very impertinently 'What's your trouble?' It was a cross-word-puzzle.

A FEW BIRDS AT DIGHA

Ananta Mitra

West Bengal now possesses a seaside resort. It is Digha on the Bay of Bengal. I had the occasion of having a short trip to Digha in the last week of October, this year. I availed this opportunity of having a glimpse of some birds on this coast line of the Bay.

On the morning of 23.x.1970 I was on the balcony of our room of Saikatabash - a tourist lodge set up by the State of West Bengal.

The sea with its beauty and grandeur was a bit rough that day. The sky was overcast with clouds. None but a few groups of fishermen were on the beach. A big net was being drawn. There came flocks of Indian River Terns (Sterna aurantia). They were gracefully plunging into the shortening arc of the drawing net and sometimes carrying small fishes in their beaks. Whirling along with them were some other birds. From the distance I could identify the Pariah and the Brahminy Kites.

As the day wore on, the weather and the sea became more and more rough and the beach showed deserted looks. There appeared a large flock of Brownheaded Gulls (Larus brunnicephalus) mostly resting on the shores. Side by side with them were a number of Little Stints (Calidris minutus) strutting along most busily near the edge of the water and collecting minute marine bodies carried to the shore by the waves.

Next morning, i.e. 24.x.1970 was bright and sunny and I could stroll along the sea shore as I pleased. Digha beach is all along planted with rows of Casuarina equisetifolia which in itself is a beautiful sight. There I got my first glimpse of a pair of Blackcapped Kingfisher (Halcyon pileata). Their colour combination seemed romantic but a bit unlike the picture in Dr Ali's The Book of Indian Birds. The underparts below their white throats were yellowish brown, more like the underparts of the Storkbilled Kingfisher. They had, of course, the large white mirrors in their primaries. Can they be any subspecies?

The birds found along the shores and/or near our lodge were: Common Drongos, Brown Shrikes, Common Bee-eaters, Jungle Mynas, Indian Rollers, Blackheaded Orioles, Tree Pie, Redwhiskered and Common bulbuls, Spotted Doves. Of course, there were House Crows, House Sparrows and Common Mynas in plenty.

I found another single bird on the beach sitting atop a casuarina tree and this I could not identify. It was a light green and white bird a bit larger than common myna. It had a greenish head, a black streak through the eyes like bee-eaters, and wings light green fading to white at the bottom. The wings at the sitting position covering the feet. Beak seemed to be short and slatish. Would any of our readers identify it?

As my stay was very short and had to leave in the afternoon of 24.x I could cover only a small area at this eastern seaboard of our country. I would like to return here when possible and would ask our readers to come here to study the avifauna of Digha which seemed rich in birdlife.

WHITEBREASTED WATERHEN

Zafar Futehally

For the past many years we have been delighted by the presence of Whitebreasted Waterhens in our garden in the suburbs of Bombay. Uncanily just before the monsoon breaks the birds arrive and announce their presence by their outlandish calls. Sometimes in the middle of their sojourn they seem to disappear suddenly. I have noted in my diary on 6.ix.1970: 'the waterhens have apparently disappeared from our garden. No signs today. They have been here for the last two months.' On 30.x.1970 I wrote: 'Just shows how wrong one can be. The Waterhens are still in our garden and now are getting as friendly as domestic poultry ... One came almost on the steps of the house! The white shirt front is not too white. Also saw a young chick a few days ago scurrying away in the neighbouring garden. Do not recall hearing them call, lately.'

This year I first saw a single bird on our lawn on the 29th of May and on the 30th I saw a pair very confident and not at all shy feeding right in the open on our lawn. Since then I have watched this pair regularly quite frequently having a dip in our lotus pond and sometimes having a very thorough wash in our birdbath. I knew from their general behaviour that they must be nesting and though once or twice I thought I would definitely find the nest by just following the birds as they stealthily walked alongside the hedge, then jumped on to a chikoo tree and then to a Golden Shower creeper where they had nested once before, I failed in my attempts. I put up a hide near the lotus pond where the birds came around 6.30 in the morning and managed to get a couple of flash photographs. One day (25.vii.1971) I saw a bird bringing an egg shell in its beak, and I knew that the eggs had hatched. On the next day I had a fascinating view of two chicks emerging from under a rosalia bush on the side of the lotus pond. This was just 10 ft away from where I was in the hide and the parents suddenly sensing danger did a most intricate dance going round in circles in front of the chicks persuading them with all their might to follow them into cover. This they obediently did.

After a few days only one chick was seen. It grew rapidly and by middle of August had reached adolescence and was quite frequently seen stepping out on its own in a confident manner. Sometimes it charged across the lawn like a race horse at a tremendous speed. From the 17th onwards the chick has not been seen and has obviously been devoured. The adults (according to

... appeared to be a little sad and dis-
 murted and seemed to call more frequently than they have been
 going in the last few days.

As I write this I see them on my lawn pecking away at insects
 and roots and I wonder whether they will attempt another fami-
 ly raising effort this season.

24.viii.1971. From my observations today it seems very like-
 ly that the birds are breeding again. For a long period there
 was only one bird seen on the lawn suggesting that the other
 was on the nest. This bird was also extremely aggressive and
 chased a Magpie Robin in the area in a very determined manner.
 Incidentally I had a lovely view of this bird having a long
 and satisfied bath in the lotus pond. It is amazing how water-
 proof the feathers are. I saw the shining water just slip off
 the feathers without leaving traces of wetness on the primar-
 ies. The bird appeared to be making a strong attempt to see
 that the water did actually reach its body through the feathers.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Intensive Study Group for the Borivali National Park

The Bombay Natural History Society has organised a group of
 enthusiasts to conduct studies on the fauna and flora of the
 Borivali National Park. One of the activities of this group
 is to mark the resident birds of the Park with coloured plast-
 ic rings. A beginning was made on 15th August 1971. Nine mist
 nets were set up around the pagoda above the Car Park. Success
 at netting was rather restricted owing to breezy conditions
 prevailing during the operations, and only five resident birds
 were netted in the course of about four hours work: 2 Redvent-
 ed Bulbuls, 1 Redwhiskered Bulbul, and two Whitethroated Bab-
 blers, and were marked with coloured plastic rings on their
 left leg. This is a small beginning, which may lead to valu-
 able developments in course of time. The activities at the
 moment are in the Pongam Valley, the area between the Car
 Park and the Vihar Lake. Birdwatchers interested in taking
 part in this work are requested to contact the Curator of the
 Bombay Natural History Society, and have from him the detail-
 ed programme of the weekly activities. The work will be car-
 ried on Sundays and public holidays.

CORRESPONDENCE

Regarding Newsletter for Birdwatchers

A hasty note to thank you for the copy of Newsletter for
 Birdwatchers. This is the first copy that I have seen. It
 seems to me a very useful publication and I am glad to see
 it and know it exists.

Lee M. Talbot
 Senior Scientist
 Council on Environmental Quality
 Washington, U.S.A.

Pre-Monsoon Breeding
of the Baya (Ploceus philipinus)

Under "Notes and Comments" in the August issue the Editor raises the question of the Baya nesting outside the Monsoon months.

Behind Aarey Market, Aarey Milk Colony, Bombay I have noticed over the last three years a colony of Bayas who start nesting activities round about the end of April. The Bayas usually nest in three Date Palms and below and around these palms there is an extensive field used for growing grass for cattle fodder. With the aid of irrigation this field is green almost throughout the year. The male Bayas of this colony make their nests from strips taken from the leaves of Date Palms and (mainly) from the grasses. Although I have made no study of this Baya colony I believe that this particular field provides adequate food for the Bayas and the ground there is always wet enough for the Bayas to obtain the blobs of mud which appear to be such a necessary part of their nests. These blobs of mud are stuck inside the dome near the egg chamber and are possibly used as balancing or anchoring agents.

So then, this Colony of Bayas would appear to have suitable breeding conditions nearly all the year round. Therefore, as soon as the males of this Colony attain breeding dress and, with it, the urge to reproduce it is but logical for them to start building their masterpieces which we prosaically call nests. Other colonies less fortunately placed have to await suitable conditions brought about by the Monsoon before they can commence the breeding ritual.

As I have said above, I have made no study of this Colony but I am sure that their breeding activities not only start early but also end early, probably before the end of August, whereas other Colonies elsewhere which start later also end later so that each colony has roughly the same breeding cycle as far as length of time is concerned.

In passing, I would add that the whole of Aarey Milk Colony - which adjoins Borivli National Park - is always pleasant to visit due to the perennial greenness of its field and it is never more refreshing to see this than in the months of April-May when the avenues of trees add to the scene their flamboyant and glorious flowers.

D.A. Stairmand,
C/O Mercantile Bank Ltd.,
G.P.O. Box 14,
London E.C.3.

(How cheering that Mr. Stairmand continues to keep in touch with us, after his departure from India). Ed.

EDITORIAL BOARD :

Dr. Salim Ali,
Bombay.

Mrs. Jamal Ara,
Ranchi.

Dr. Biswamoy Biswas,
Calcutta.

Kunvar Shri Lavkumar,
Rajkot.

Prof. K. K. Neelakantan,
Trivandrum.

Mr. B. R. Grubh,
Bombay.

Mr. R. L. Fleming, Junior,
Kathmandu, Nepal.

Mr. D. A. Stairmand,
Bombay.

Br. A. Navarro,
Bombay.

Editor :

Mr. Zafar Futehally,
32A, Juhu Lane, Andheri,
Bombay-58 AS.

Annual Subscription Rs. 10/-.

Students Rs. 5/-.

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

VOL XI NO 10 OCTOBER 1971



CONTENTS

| | |
|---|---|
| Dual nationality, by Owen Martin | 1 |
| Blackwinged Kite nesting in Kerala, by K. N. Nair | 3 |
| A trip to the Elephant pond, by A. Mangalik | 4 |
| Roosting flight; with a discourse on the Reef Heron, by D. A. Stairmand | 6 |
| Notes and Comments | 9 |
| Correspondence | 9 |
| <hr/> | |
| Nesting of the Paradise Flycatcher, from Yuvraj Shivraj Kumar of Jasdan | |
| Nesting of the Baya Weaver Bird (<u>Ploceus philippinus</u>) from J. S. Serrao | |

DUAL NATIONALITY

Owen Martin

It is surprising how many birds are nationals of both India and England. I became very aware of this when I lived in Lahore a long time ago, before that delightful place became out of bounds. There in the cold weather we saw migrants I knew at home during their breeding season and I found it strange and exciting to see European Swallows, for example, alongside a, to me exotic, Roller or Drongo. Of course I ignored any idea that those swallows might have come from no further than Kashmir!

In England, Starlings play the part of Common Mynas in India; in Lahore, we had both. Every autumn a few starlings came through heading south for the plains; some stopped in the garden for an hour or so to feed and bathe and entertain us, and then were gone. In reverse, Rosy Pastors are reported most years in England as stragglers, whereas in Lahore we had them in garrulous droves. They fed on the simul flowers and later gorged the mulberry crop; not once in five seasons was I able to beat them to that delectable harvest.

Another migrant we saw on passage every year was the Wryneck, a bird I knew well at home in my youth. Since then, the wryneck has become rare in England; I do not know why. The decline started before the use of pesticides, and suitable habitat is still there - if depleted by pressure of so-called civilization. The fact is that the wryneck seems almost a lost species in England. A pity - each spring we listened for its Pee pee . . . call notes, which always came shortly after those of the first cuckoo. This, incidentally, is why the country folk thought the wryneck was the cuckoo's mate!

2

So I was delighted to see a wryneck in Delhi Zoo on my last visit - wild and free, I hasten to add. It was picking ants almost from under the feet of the crowd. Shortly afterwards - and this has nothing whatever to do with migrants or vanishing species - we saw a Baybacked Shrike attacking a lizard almost twice its length. Although battered, the lizard survived.

Races of many of the little green warblers are common to both countries, and so difficult are they to identify that I have almost given up the battle. In England, you can at least tell a Willow Warbler from a Chiffchaff by vastly different song, but not so in India where - in my experience, anyway - they are silent. The Wagtails are equally confusing. In England the common one is the Pied, Motacilla alba var-rellii, and in India it is of course the White, M. alba alba. But I have seen the latter in England, and I have seen in India what I would swear to be varrellii. Then there are the Yellow and the Grey. I can glibly identify them as flava and cinerea - but of what race? And when it comes to the Blue-headed, and variants, I give up.

Some of the birds of prey also overlap at the ends of my birdwatching beat. We have Kestrels which stoop successfully at the House Sparrows in our Surrey garden, and I am minded of a splendid kestrel sighting with G. S. Ranganathan at Tughlak's Fort near New Delhi. We were at the top of the battlements watching swifts and Rock-chats when we saw the kestrel, away up in the blue, wings shimmering, tail fanned. It hung for an instant, dropped a few feet, poised again, then down - straight and silent - to its prey at the foot of the wall below us. A wonderful stoop and a clean kill of an under-sized grasshopper!

We also see Kites in England, though not many. The Pariah, or Black - Milvus migrans - is a very rare straggler, but in deepest Wales we have a small but fairly successful breeding colony of Red Kites, Milvus milvus. And Ospreys - I once saw one over Tansa Lake in the old days, and here in England - or rather Scotland - they are breeding again after a lapse of a hundred years, at a reserve established by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. Last year four pairs raised eight young between them, and over 30,000 visitors each paid the equivalent of five rupees for a distant view of one of the eyries through a telescope from a hide. I wish we could make birdwatching in India as popular and as profitable!

Last winter a Collared Dove, Streptopelia decaocto came to our garden for the first time. You know this bird as the Indian Ring Dove; its recent rapid expansion across Europe and the the British Isles is now a matter of ornithological history. Our English Ring Dove, Columba palumbus is a different creature; a big lumpy grey pigeon the size of a Green Pigeon. The Handbook, Vol. 3, page 130 describes it as an

'erratic wanderer' in northern India.

I suppose the waders and wildfowl have the biggest claim to dual nationality. I have seen Dunlin tripping like little fairy ballet dancers on the coast at Surat and on English estuaries, Widgeon and Pintail on the Sutlej and on London reservoirs, Godwit on Mahim Creek and on North Sea shores. We have sightings each year even of such typically Indian species as Cattle Egrets, Night Herons and Spoonbills. And of my favourite waders, the Blackwinged Stilts; I wish they were more than just rare visitors to England. In India, my last sight of them is usually on that same creek at Mahim, en route for Santa Cruz and home.

BLACKWINGED KITE NESTING IN KERALA

K. N. Nair

On 28.xi.1969 while watching birds at Walayar, a Blackwinged Kite was seen carrying a twig in its beak. Closer examination revealed that a pair of birds were engaged in nesting. The nest was being constructed on an Inga dulcis tree standing on the bund of an irrigation tank situated in an open area having scattered trees like palmyra palm, tamarind, Acacia arabica, etc. Only a few twigs were seen collected and placed on a branch of this tree at a height of about 30 ft. The birds might have started nest construction a couple of days ago; they were rather silent.

On 1.xii.1969 the birds were seen collecting twigs and constructing the nest which was a loose untidy crow-like structure of twigs. On 2.xii and 5.xii, they were engaged in collecting material for lining the nest. This consisted of dry weeds, roots, etc. collected from the adjoining ploughed fields. The birds are very particular in selecting good material for lining, for they were seen discarding certain material after lifting it to some height. They now returned to the nest at longer intervals than before.

No activities were seen on 6.xii and 7.xii. One bird was in the nest and the other perched on a tree nearby. There was a lot of interference from crows. The birds were vociferous while chasing the crows and silent at other times. Though birds like parakeets and mynas visited the tree, they were ignored. On 11.xii, there was considerable interference from crows.

On the 24th December, the bird was not brooding as expected. One was on a tree a little away from the nest. As the area was approached, the bird flew away to another tree where its mate was and both of them flew away as if courting and one returned to the same tree. They were very vociferous; crows were noticed troubling them.

On 26.xii one was in the nest brooding while the other was perched in a nearby tree; they were silent.

On 2.i.1970 one bird was seen returning to nest with a mouse in its talons. It alighted near the nest and settled and settled in it after eating the mouse. After some time its mate came and alighted on a tree nearby. As soon as it alighted, it was seen dropping something which was found to be small dead mouse. It immediately flew away and returned with a fairly big rodent and ate it leisurely, perched on a branch near the nest. A tree-pie came to the tree but was ignored.

On the next visit to the nest site on 15.i a remarkable change was noticed in the birds. One of the birds was by the side of the nest, and as the tree was approached it flew away to a nearby tree. But it was restless, and was flying round and round the nest tree but did not enter the nest. Both the parents were observed frequently flying in search of food. They resented a close approach to the nest tree. Twice they flew towards me and I had to wave my hat and binoculars in an attempt to drive them away.

On 23.i only one bird was seen. The other was probably in the nest. There were about 60-70 crows in the locality and the bird outside the nest was constantly engaged in driving them away vociferously.

Three nestlings about the size of a myna were seen by the side of the nest on 28.i. The black of the eye was very conspicuous; but the white colour was rather dirty. The birds did not like my presence in the vicinity and once tried to attack me.

On 4.ii the nestlings were flying about. They had grown considerably and it was difficult to distinguish them in flight from their parents. The parents resented my proximity and once attacked me. On my last visit on 11.ii all the birds were near the nest. The nestlings had become as big as the parents. As I had to be away from this place for some time, it was not possible to watch the birds afterwards.

This is probably the first record of the Blackwinged Kite nesting in Kerala.

A TRIP TO THE ELEPHANT POND

A. Mangalik

As a result of some difficulty with a local headmaster and the rain Gods we had to change our plans of going to Gulmarg (after the skis had been waxed and the boots oiled). The forest of Khilser near Yamuna Nagar was suggested for the remaining few days of the vacation in December.

We spent three days in the Hathnikund rest house. The main aim of the trip was birdwatching, for which there was considerable scope. The trees around the rest house,

the river and the reeds all provided a variety of birds.

Just upstream of the resthouse the river spreads out amongst rocks and is shallow. In this, we saw a large number of Brahminy Ducks. Along the bank were a number of White, Pied and Yellow Wagtail. The Redwattled Lapwings as usual were noisy and conspicuous. A number of Black Redstarts (male and female) and Whitecapped Redstarts were seen on the rocks where the water had been diverted to make a channel for a water mill. Bulbuls, the Whitecheeked and a few Redvented ones were seen on the fruit trees around the hillock on which the resthouse is built. Here we saw the Rufousbacked and Bay-backed Shrikes, Dark Grey Bushchats, Cinnamon Tree Sparrows, Indian Robins, Indian Wren Warblers, Whitethroated Munias, White-eyes, Common Sparrows and Jungle Crows. Pipits, Crested Larks, Jungle Babblers and Ring Doves were also frequently seen in big groups eating seeds of the tall 'Sarkanda'. We also came across a Rufoustailed Flycatcher.

Overhead were some fascinating big birds. In Simla in October we had seen these large dark birds and were unable to identify them. We had 'hoped' we saw the lammergeir but could not really fit in the description. Khushwant Singh in I shall not hear the nightingale mentions the lammergeir on a number of occasions and so we had seriously considered this possibility. I was able to follow one of these birds as it came down to perch on a tree and was really surprised to find that it was a Whitebacked Vulture. Such are the problems of a novice! The other common bird over-head was the Neophron. The most fascinating sight was that of an Osprey. The huge bird dived on a number of occasions and once I saw it catch a big fish which it took over a rock, and crushed it by throwing it down to rapidly devour it up. This was in sharp contrast with the fishing methods of the Pied Kingfishers which were also seen often but were much less here than around Delhi. I saw one Pied Kingfisher with a double crest and of a size almost double of what may be called a 'King'-Kingfisher.

The next day we drove into the reserve forest. We were accompanied by a professional shikari turned guide. Despite his best efforts we saw no animals - not even spotted deer! Towards the evening we did hear a panther. In the forest we saw a number of birds which we have not seen in the Delhi area. There were a number of Blackheaded Orioles, Golden-backed and Pied (? West Himalayan) Woodpeckers. Also there were some chloropses. I had a glimpse of a flock of Jungle-fowl.

The forest was very dry and as mentioned there was little evidence of life. Human encroachment was prominent specially in the form of wood cutting and cattle grazing. In one

*Himalayan Pied Kingfisher.

place there was wide-spread clearing of the forest for the purpose of planting Eucalyptus. It is difficult to accept the short-sighted policy of planting this foreign tree into our forests. Despite its economic value I cannot understand how the dangers of tampering with ecology can be neglected.

The trip was all too brief. The third morning we saw the Tajewala headworks before returning to Delhi. We saw a lone Whitenecked Stork in one of the fields. There was the usual compliment of birds we could not identify. These were the 'small brown ones'. These unfortunately are a feature of all our trips - the help of good birdwatcher could make all the difference.

The following are some tips for those wanting to visit the Khilser forest. On the Karnal by-pass there is a sign to 'Y. Nagar'. This is not the best route and it is better to drive on to Piply (Kurukshetra) and then turn east toward Yamunanagar. From Yamunanagar one can proceed on the Paonta road or go towards Dadupur. The road to Dadupur is definitely safer than the direct route which involves driving through a river with about 18 inches of water. From Dadupur to Tajewala again, one can go along the canal road or the public road. There are buses available to Yamunanagar from Delhi and then on to Tajewala.

There are three resthouses in the area: Hathikund (canal department and Haryana tourist department), Tajewala (canal department), and the forest resthouse near the forest. Charges are reasonable, Rs5.50 a day. Except fresh vegetables all the necessities are available.

ROOSTING FLIGHT, with a discourse on the Reef Heron

D. A. Stairmand

Mr E. A. Palkhiwalla in Newsletter Vol. 11(5): 12 asks for identification of a flight of c. 50 birds flying in formation at a considerable height at about 7 p.m. every evening in Bombay in April. Although Mr Palkhiwalla does not mention whether the birds were seen flying over the sea and the movement 'west to east' goes a little against my assumption I feel that they might well have been Reef Herons (Egretta gularis).

For over two years I have been able to study from my flat balcony the comings and goings of a colony of Reef Herons that roost in the trees at Breach Candy from September until May. In the winter of 1968-69 there were c. 24 Reef Herons in this particular colony and the following winter the number built up to about 36 by mid November. Regrettably this winter (1970-71) the maximum number was down to c. 24 again. The proportion of birds in the slaty phase to the white phase was, in all cases, in the ratio of approximately 4 : 1. How-

ever, I am told that across the harbour from Bombay this ratio is reversed.

The Reef Heron is said to breed ' between April and August in Sind (Karachi City and harbour) and Kutch (Gulf of Kutch); end of May in Ceylon (Chilaw; rare), no record elsewhere in between ' (Ind. Handbook Vol. 1), which is, in itself, very intriguing to an enquiring mind.

The Reef Herons in Bombay usually begin to arrive by about mid September (the odd one or two - mainly immature birds -- may be seen a little earlier). That is not only ' my ' local colony but other birds which may be seen on the Salt Pans, rocky shorelines, etc. of Bombay. There is a big build-up in numbers over the first few weeks and it has been a constant delight of mine to watch an increasing number flight in eastwards over the sea to the big trees at Breach Candy at about 30 minutes after sunset in early winter against a multi-coloured sky. This colony does not flight in altogether. Firstly there are 'twos or threes but usually later on there is a formation of about 12-20 birds flying some 50-60 feet above the sea, with the typical flapping flight of the Heron family, in very attractive close formation. This large flight is usually the last of the colony to return to roost for the night from their day's fishing at Hornby Vellard and beyond and it arrives when there is very little light left so that it is extremely difficult to make out the birds' colours at all. All the birds look ' dark ' until on their final arc into the trees the background of buildings reveals some Reef Herons in the white phase. While awaiting for this large flight I have often seen, particularly in early and late winter, flights of 20-50 Reef Herons well out to sea travelling from North to South or vice versa. They fly in tight formation about 50 feet above the water flapping their wings steadily. Of an evening I have also seen similar flights of these birds over Back Bay and there is probably a sizeable regular colony in the Government House grounds area during winter. The trees at Breach Candy used by the Reef Herons winter are occupied solely by c. 80 crows until the Reef Herons arrive and there are many evenings of battling with the crows before the Reef Herons re-establish themselves. A week or two after this Paddy Birds - this year c. 30 - join the Reef Herons for the months up to May. I have noticed that the Reef Heron is more crepuscular than the Paddy Bird. Whereas the Paddy Birds comings and goings are usually fairly close to sunset and sunrise, the Reef Herons leave about 30 minutes before sunrise and return about the same period after sunset. However, both the Reef Herons and Paddy Birds' movements are somewhat governed by tides. If there is a particularly strong, high tide approaching around sunrise or sunset these birds may be observed to stay longer in the trees. The reason for this is quite apparent - the rocks (or reefs) from which they fish are covered or about to be covered by the sea.

The number of Reef Herons in the Bombay vicinity decreases

rapidly around the middle of April and it would be interesting to know whether Mr Palkhiwalla's flights diminished in numbers or disappeared about then. Mr Palkhiwalla mentions his birds circling around. This is not an unusual feature in the Reef Herons I watch. They often break formation shortly before reaching their roosting places and circle around; swirling and delighting to float into the wind against the glorious coloured sky before sweeping in to roost. In formation or other fairly long distance flight their necks are drawn well into their bodies - as in Cattle Egrets, Little Egrets, etc. - but when they 'float' and this is frequently into the North wind of winter - their necks are partially stretched out, with a charming typical kink, and against the lovely setting of twilight they look like something wonderful out of Disney.

This attempted answer to Mr Palkhiwalla has inadvertently developed into a discourse on the Reef Heron, for which many apologies, but my pen has run away with me. Mr Palkhiwalla's birds could, I suppose, have been Night Herons flying out in the evening but a flight of 50 would perhaps be a little unusual for those birds and the noise of their raucous calls would create quite an impression. Another possibility is the Cattle Egret but their flight formation is not so likely to attract attention and they generally flight a bit lower than the Reef Heron. The Reef Herons fly in silence and it is an interesting fact that whereas they most often spend the day in solitariness they group themselves together in the evening flight to their roosting place.

I cannot help feeling that the 'black Cattle Egrets' mentioned by Mr S. G. Neginhal in his very interesting Tungabhadra Reservoir Birds (Newsletter 11(5): 6-8) were possibly Reef Herons of the slaty phase, flying with those of the white phase. The Reef Heron - being a true egret - is a more beautiful bird than the Cattle Egret but they are both quite similar in appearance in flight and there is not much difference in the colour of their bills. Admittedly the slaty phase Reef Heron is not black but it could look to be very dark in fading light and their shades of 'slaty' do vary, possibly according to age as immature birds' slaty parts are pale slaty. I wouldn't let it worry anyone that the birds seen by Mr Neginhal were inland as Reef Herons are not uncommon at Deolali, Nasik, for example. Mr Neginhal's birds could hardly be thought by any reader to have been cormorants or black ibis. The very fact that these dark birds were in flight with 'Cattle Egrets' indicates to me that they were all Reef Herons. Incidentally, flights of hundreds of Little Cormorants fly, of a winter evening, directly over a certain hillock at Deolali on their way home to roost. They don't adjust altitude when passing over the hillock and this makes them pass very close overhead an observer sitting on the top of

October 1971

9

of the hillock. They all have their bills slightly open in flight - I wonder why? The only sound is from their wings.

Mr Neginhal mentions a large number of crepuscular and nocturnal birds which started coming to the river at dusk and rightly wishes to know more about them. However, I think he is mistaken in thinking he could study them with a searchlight. Perhaps a brilliant moonlit night - with Mr Neginhal well concealed - would be a better idea. I am fully in sympathy with him regarding his wish that somebody should write something about nocturnal birds. I would avidly welcome any informative article on Bitterns, Owls, Nightjars, etc. in the Newsletter.

I know these are written about very expertly in 'the books' but is anything more alive and readable than the Newsletter?

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Field Outing

The field outing on Sunday, 26th September 1971 at the Borivali National Park was most enjoyable though only half a dozen people turned up owing to inclement weather. It was a beautiful day however, and it was fascinating to see the flora looking so different to its appearance in the dry weather. The sheesham (Dalbergia latifolia) looked delightful with feathery white flowers. And among the trees identified for us by Prof. P. V. Bole were Morinda tinctoria, Garcia pinnata, Trema orientalis, Bahaunia racemosa, Strobilum aspera, Delinia pentaphylla, Adina cordifolia, Ficus arnottiana, Anogeisus latifolia, Terminalia crenulata, and Schleicheria trijuga. One of the members of the group Pat Louis has taken some delightful colour pictures of the flowers in the Park, and it seems worth while producing an illustrated check-list of the numerous trees, shrubs and climbers in the Park. The Newsletter could make a beginning with this provided some of our readers are in a position to provide sketches of the trees listed. Will any one volunteer to do so?

* * *

Birdwatchers' Field Club of India

One of the questions raised at the last Annual General Meeting of the Bombay Natural History Society was that the existence of the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India came in the way of the membership drive of the Bombay Natural History Society. It was said for example that members of the Birdwatchers' Field Club who paid an annual subscription of only Rs10/- were invited to the meetings and film shows organized by the Bombay Natural History Society. Why then should they become members of the BNHS by paying a higher subscription of Rs36/- per year? It is true that this argument appli-

es only to the Bombay members of both these institutions. But nevertheless it will be interesting to investigate whether this proposition holds good.

The Editor's view is that far from coming in the way of the Bombay Natural History Society, the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India in fact helps to promote the objectives of the Society, and many members who do not have a serious interest in Natural History but who are interested in birds in a general way start subscribing to the Newsletter, then get seriously interested, and ultimately also become members of the Bombay Natural History Society. This view is not based on statistics but only on chance conversation with one or two people.

The Editor will be obliged if all readers of the Newsletter would write back to say:

- i. Whether they were members of the Bombay Natural History Society before joining the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India;
- ii. whether they joined the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India without being members of the BNHS;
- iii. whether they first joined the Birdwatchers' Field Club and then joined the BNHS;
- iv. and finally whether those who were first members of the BNHS discontinued their membership and have remained members only of the Birdwatchers' Field Club.

Fauna of British India volumes

Here is a rare opportunity for any birdwatcher who may be interested in buying the set of 8 volumes of E. C. Stuart Baker's Fauna of British India, Birds, 1922-30. The books were recently bought in a London second-hand bookshop, for a total cost of £21/-, and are in good condition. Those interested may write to: Mrs R. W. Ghate, Shivangaon, Nagpur, 5, M.S.

CORRESPONDENCE

Nesting of the Paradise Flycatcher

On the 14th July 1957 I had seen a nest of the Paradise Flycatcher (Terpsiphone paradisi) in a babool tree in a nallah in the Rampara Wildlife Preserve near Wankaner belonging to H.H. the Maharana Rajsahab of Wankaner. On the 18th July 1958, I had again seen the nest at the same place. At both these times the bird was incubating eggs. On 12 September 1971 I took Dr Salim Ali to see this place and to my surprise we saw a nest of the Paradise Flycatcher at the same place where I had seen it years ago. The nest was from the last season. This shows how birds will breed regularly in the same

place if left undisturbed.

Shivraj Kumar Khachar
Jasdan, Gujarat

Nesting of the Baya Weaver Bird (Ploceus philippinus)

The Baya Weaver building nests towards the end of May in Kolaba district, reported by the Editor (Newsletter Vol. 11 (8): 12) is not unusual. In 1930 Dr Salim Ali came across in Alibag Taluka, Kolaba district weaver males in breeding plumage in mid May; he saw a company of them in full nuptial dress busily building on 22.v (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 34: 947-64).

In the September issue of the Newsletter /Vol. 11(9): 127 Mr D. A. Stairmand refers to the colony which activates towards the end of April in the grass field behind Aarey Market in Bombay. For some seasons now I have had this colony under observation and am inclined to believe that each year it consists almost entirely of 'Bachelor' or 'Doodling' nests. These are built by the males of the year who do not secure a mate to rear a family. When the colony starts these males are in female plumage and give the impression that females are building. A great proportion of these nests do not progress beyond the 'helmet' stage of construction. Thus, in a colony of 30 odd nests each year, there were 3 completed nests in 1969, one in 1970, and in the current breeding season four completed nests on 26.ix.1971.

J. S. Serrao
Bombay

Zafar Futehally
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers
32A, Juhu Lane
Andheri, Bombay 58-AS

EDITORIAL BOARD :

Dr. Salim Ali,
Bombay.

Mrs. Jamal Ara,
Ranchi.

Dr. Biswamoy Biswas,
Calcutta.

Kunvar Shri Lavkumar,
Rajkot.

Prof. K. K. Neelakantan,
Trivandrum.

Mr. B. R. Grubh,
Bombay.

Mr. R. L. Fleming, Junior,
Kathmandu, Nepal.

Mr. D. A. Stairmand,
Bombay.

Br. A. Navarro,
Bombay.

Editor :

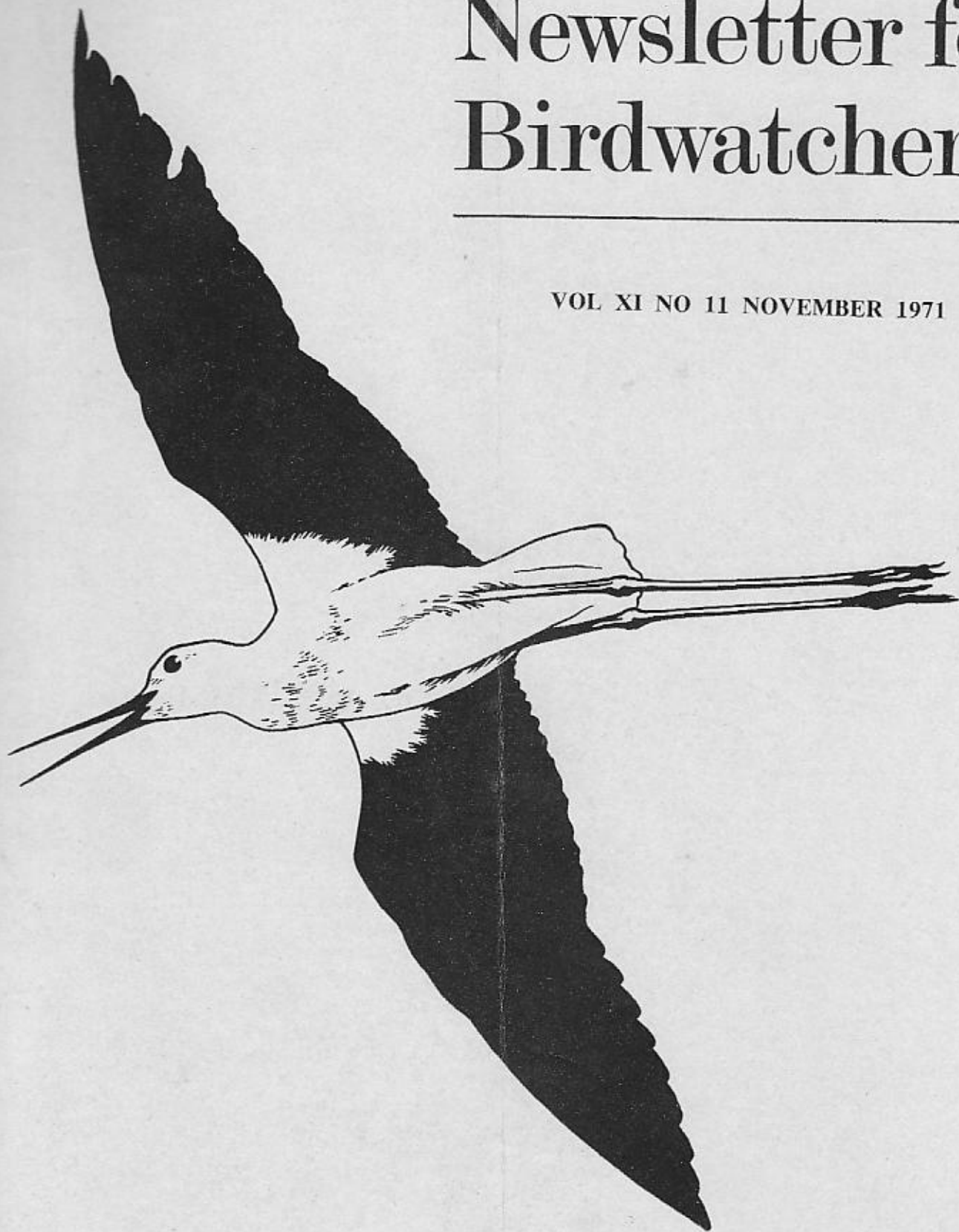
Mr. Zafar Futehally,
32A, Juhu Lane, Andheri,
Bombay-58 AS.

Annual Subscription Rs. 10/-.

Students Rs. 5/-.

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

VOL XI NO 11 NOVEMBER 1971



NEWSLETTER FOR

BIRDWATCHERS

November 1971

Volume 11, Number 11

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Delightful distractions, by Brig. R. Lokaranjan | 1 |
| Early morning on a Khandala Hillside, by D. A. Stairmand | 3 |
| The avifauna of Parhap - a small isolated Reserved Forest, in Bihar, by Jamal Ara | 6 |
| Indo-German bird sanctuary, R. S. Dharmakumarsinhji | 10 |
| Notes and Comments | 10 |
| Correspondence | 12 |
| Turnstone (<u>Arenaria interpres</u>) in Poona, from Prakash Gole | |

DELIGHTFUL DISTRACTIONS

Brig. R. Lokaranjan

The letter from Shivraj Kumar Kacher, in the correspondence column of the October 1971 issue of the Newsletter regarding the nest of the Paradise Flycatcher seen at the same place in July 1957 and '58, then again in 1971, reminded me vividly of a somewhat similar experience of mine.

Perhaps the first time I consciously observed these fascinating birds was during a short visit to Udampur (J. & K.) in 1963. Not wanting to attract undue attention watching the birds, I merely loitered outside the bosses's office, where I was summoned, long enough to notice the nimble twisting and turning of the male birds with their streaming, waving, long tails. It was all very fascinating to me. I also noticed a nest, which I presumed must be the Paradise Flycatcher's. On my return to my rather bleak station (it happened to be Leh) reference to Salim Ali's Book of Indian Birds, describing the bird's nest which was so distinctly a woven cup in a forked portion of a branch, with a nicely plastered look on the outside, confirmed my views. I forgot this incident of the identification of the nest, but the memories of seeing these birds - rather their tails! - that morning remained quite vivid right up to the time six years later, when it so happened that I moved there, and occupied the same office. The month was April, in 1969. There were mulberry trees amongst the others in the area and these were full of fruit.

and the commotion of various birds was to say the least very noisy; but what a delightful distraction from work!

My constantly peeping out of the window while files marked 'urgent' kept coming in, and my readjusting my chair and office table to a better-suited position in the midst of all the confusion of files and visitors, caused some problems to my FA particularly, but he gallantly refrained from giving me the slightest indication of what appeared to him no doubt a marked eccentricity in my office seating arrangements! I later however shared the secret of watching the birds with him, as my binoculars were carefully concealed in the 'pending' tray and he had to be told! An unforgettable experience of the nesting of a white-eye, that fluffy little greenish yellow fellow, just a few feet from my window was another experience shared with a chosen few, but that I will write about some other day.

To get back to the Paradise Flycatchers of Udhampur, I was time and again distracted from important work, but always rewarded with the most impressionable and striking antics of these birds. Above all, 'the agile fairy-like movements of the male as he twists and turns in the air after flies, with his tail ribbons looping or trailing behind' (I'm quoting Salim Ali) 'a spectacle of exquisite charm'!

It was such a pleasant surprise when a few days later I suddenly noticed a nest! 'Ah' I thought as I now recollected the forgotten incident of six years earlier, 'could it possibly be the same nest?'. I racked my brain and paced up and down to reconstrue the earlier loitering outside this office. Where could I have stood? Which was the tree? and so on! I was soon quite sure that it was the same nest.

Then a year went by. In April/May 1970, I had the same delightful experience as winter ended and it was spring. Dry twigs so rapidly bore millions of green leaves - birds' voices created a din - mulberries, appeared as if from nowhere - the 'fairies' of paradise reappeared - and then THE NEST. The same one was occupied. Again I had the same joyful experience of observing all this and particularly the posterior of the bird just visible, seated on its eggs! I saw the whole thing repeated in 1971 also.

I have now left that place on transfer. The sad thing is that the old office may not be there in 1972. A new office is being built, 'pakka' this and 'pakka' that, a storied building a hundred yards away, with a car park outside, and so on! Give me back the old tent in an orchard or garden, back in 'the field'. But it cannot be so, I know. It may be appropriate here to quote Thomas Moore

'When time who steals our years away,
Shall steal our pleasures, too
The memory of the past will stay
and half our joys renew.'

EARLY MORNING ON A KHANDALA HILLSIDE

D. A. Stairmand

To be more precise the hill to the east of the Duke's Nose on the morning of 2nd May from 5.45 a.m. - 9 a.m. The hill is a few hundred feet high and it's a fairly stiff climb up three-quarters of the way, then there are small tracks leading westwards across the hillside. These tracks pass over nullahs and even in May there is quite a lot of undergrowth. This stretch is generally well wooded mainly with smallish trees (which I can't identify but presume are typical trees of this part of the Western Ghats) and there are big euphorbia brakes over the nullahs. Some of the trees I could recognize were Siris (Albizia lebbek) in flower, many Coral (Erythrina sp.) mainly very spikey and bare with only a few flowers left on the branches, and some splendid Kusims (Schleichera oleosa).

Although it was May it was a very pleasant cool morning with a goodish breeze and as I went along a track three-quarters of the way up the hillside and rounded a bush I came upon a pair of Grey Junglefowl feeding and they rapidly made for cover with excited calls. At just on sunrise I decided to sit down well tucked into a bush so that I not only had good cover all round but also commanded a good view. Within minutes a pair of Red Spurfowl came into sight but instantly saw me and made off in panic. From dawn the Junglecocks had been calling and this continued on the hillside for several hours. Often they were near to me but they kept good cover. I also heard the whistles of Bush Quail close by.

Sitting quietly in this bush - like a dog facing out of its kennel - I noticed a Jungle Crow perched on a bare Coral and being harrassed by a pair of Whitebellied Drongos (Dicrurus caerulescens) who were flying at the crow from behind. The crow often turned its head and thrust violently at the Drongos with its huge bill. The crow was literally fighting a rear-guard action! These drongos looked tiny against the crow and took some time to dislodge it. I have noticed on previous occasions that the Whitebellied Drongo does not deal quite as effectively with the crow as other Dicruridae do. These were the only drongos I saw at Khandala all week-end. A Whitethroated Ground Thrush mounted the bare Coral nearest me - about 20 yards away - and sang enthusiastically and well for some minutes. Then a Magpie Robin sang no less enthusiastically a little further away. I should mention that this hillside was full of Redwhiskered and Redvented Bulbuls and their cheeriness was definitely an essential part of the scene. After over two years practice I now find it comparatively easy to pick out another very typical bird of Khandala - the Small Green Barbet (Megalaima viridis). I saw much of these obliteratedly coloured birds which are readily distinguishable from the Large Green Barbet (M. zeylonicus) as the latter has

a very noticeable naked orange-coloured patch around the eye. I think that many of the Small Green Barbets had already hacked their nest tunnels around mid March and now the birds were mainly seen in flight and in the foliage canopy of trees. However there was one bird low down on a moss-covered bough looking very interested in the wood. Coppersmiths and Wood Shrikes (Tephrodornis pondicerianus), were also seen up in the trees while the mellow calls of Scimitar Babblers got closer, however without me seeing these birds. An ashy grey bird flew straight and I failed to 'pick it up' with binoculars but from the general look of the bird and calls heard just before it was undoubtedly an Indian Cuckoo (Cuculus micropterus). Up to one year ago this hillside was a regular Khandala beat of mine and I was now surprised that I did not see or hear any Tree Pies (Dendrocitta vagabunda) - formerly they were usually around. I have also noticed their absence - or, at least, apparent absence - from the Hotel area over the past year. The main purpose of this revisit to the hillside was to see sunbirds - in particular the Yellowbacked Sunbird (Aethopyga siparaja) and the Small Sunbirds (Nectarinia minima) the males of both of which are absolute gems. I had now moved into a densely shaded wooded area with much undergrowth and I disturbed a pair of Red Spurfowl on the track. They made off with a great fluster and flurry of reddish brown bodies and dark heads. A little before a cock had called its rattling Krrr-krek, Krr-krek, Krr-krek. Soon I found sunbirds. A big Siris was in full flower and all around the flowers were Yellowbacked Sunbirds, Purple Sunbirds, Loten's Sunbird and at least one male Small Sunbird and perhaps a few females or males in non-breeding dress. These birds were not always easy to see as the Siris was a big tree and up the slope, so often the sunbirds were lost to view above the tree canopy. I always think the Siris looks like a superb Rain Tree (Enterolobium saman) and, in fact, these two trees are closely related. The yellowbacked sunbirds were the most numerous of the Nectariniidae and I suppose there must have been at least ten glorious males and several of the less noticeable females flitting around the Siris so electrically. Also in this tree was a Goldfronted Chloropses taking insects and this lively bird looked almost pedestrian compared with the quick-silver of the sunbirds. Walking on through this shaded steep area after having had a long look at the sunbirds I remembered the flycatchers that were seen there during my first two winters in Bombay when every 'new' bird was a miracle to me. The most common flycatchers up there had been the Redbreasted and the most striking the Paradise. As I came out of the thicket into more open parts I recalled a glorious male Bluewinged Parakeet (Psittacula columboides) who had perched on a bare bough one winter's day for as long as I liked to look at him. His red bill and brilliant blue-green and black collar were perfection, but I can't remember that he spoke to me in Arabic.

5

I was now on the extreme westside of the hill with a glorious unobstructed view of the Duke's Nose and the forest below. My hilltop was a cliff ledge and two Redrumped Swallows (Hirundo daurica) flew around. I had rather expected Dusky Crag Martins as those birds had been common near the foot of this hill. The Redrumped Swallows were extremely lovely to watch as they banked in flight showing their chestnut rumps and the sunlight made their deep blue coloration shine. A pair of Crested Serpent Eagles (Spilornis cheela) soared and called with wild freedom and the diagnostic white bar across the tail was clear to see when the tail was spread out. One bird came down to rest on a small tree above me and as it passed excreta it ruffled its body feathers and the bird's markings became much more easy to see. As I sat on the edge of the hillside watching the swallows and eagles in flight a strong wind whistled around me and it was difficult to realise that it was a May morning near Bombay. A very far cry indeed from the staleness of Warden Road.

I retraced my steps and the sunbirds were still around the Siris. Just beyond I heard the loud percussive, clear whistles of a party of those delightful little birds the Spotted Babbler (Pellorneum ruficeps). They had been calling all morning on the hillside - he'll beat you, he'll beat you, he'll beat you, etc. but now they were in, what to me, is their wonderful singing mood. They were on thin branches and I got very close to them. I think that there were over one dozen birds in this party but I could concentrate only on a few as they were spread over two to three small trees and occasionally flew boisterously at one another. Their song is very loud for the size of the bird and I find that it has great purity of sound; and how lively they are. Two birds were within an inch or so of each other and as one started its loud clear whistling rambling up and down the scale the other followed just a split second behind. They were whistling into each other's ears with feathers on the head raised to form a crest; breast, rump and tail cover feathers fluffed out and tails twitching violently. Others continued when these two stopped and there were pleasant calls and much chasing. They stayed for over ten minutes and it thrilled me even more than when I saw much the same sort of thing from them down below the Hotel last monsoon. Dr. Navarro remarked in one of his Bird Recorder's Diary programmes on AIR last year that this song is rather monotonous. Maybe, but to see the antics and sheer naughtiness of these little birds that goes with the song is really an exhilarating spectacle. The Whitethroated Ground Thrush is fond of imitating the Spotted Babbler's song but the song then comes forth with a thrush's typical romantic intonation and loses much of its gaiety.

As I came down the hill there were parties of Jungle Babblers, some Jungle Mynas, bulbuls, Pied Bushchats, Green Bee-eaters, Ground Thrushes feeding on the ground or singing

from shady trees, pairs of Loras with one male sporting his feathers in display and a pair of Blacknaped Blue Flycatchers (Monarcha azurea) making agile sallies in the deep shade of a Kusim.

A wonderful morning? Yes, but those are the golden hours of birdwatching.

THE AVIFAUNA OF HARHAP - A SMALL ISOLATED RESERVED FOREST IN BIHAR

Jamal Ara

Harhap is nine miles (14.4 km) to the southeast of Ranchi town lying on latitude 23°20'N. and longitude 85°28'E. It is 4 miles (6.4 km) from the nearest railway station, Tatisilwai. It is reached by an all-weather road, and is an idyllic spot of its own kind. But Harhap finds no mention as a tourist attraction of Ranchi plateau - emphasis being all the time on the waterfalls.

Harhap was declared a Reserved Forest in 1883 and is one of the oldest Rservees in the State of Bihar. It forms a small compact block of slightly over 3 miles in length and 1 mile in breadth at its widest (4.8 km x 1.6 km).

The ground is hilly for the most part and is considerably cut up by ravines and nullahs. The salient feature is a high ridge of gneiss, the crest of which forms the southern boundary of the Block, with many large barren rocky outcrops. The forest covers the northern slope of this ridge and the undulating and broken ground at its foot. The soil for the most part is coarse, sandy and of poor quality. On the steeper slopes it is very shallow, and even at the lower levels and in the depressions, erosion has greatly impoverished the soil.

Climate. The average rainfall of Namkom and Ranchi, 4 (6.4 km) and 9 (14.4 km) miles to the west of Harhap are 55.9 and 60.75 inches (1388 mm and 1519 mm) respectively. The average relative humidity at Ranchi ranges between 42 in the month of April and 89 in August. The maximum shade temperature in hot weather varies from 90°F (32.2°C) to 105°F (40°C) and very rarely 110°F (43.3°C). In the months of December and January temperatures range as low as 38°F (3.3°C) but frost is not recorded.

Forest types. Harhap comes within Champion's Tropical Moist Deciduous Forests. The sub-type is C1-Moist Sal forests.

The predominant tree is sal (Shorea robusta). During the last 25 years or so, lantana has made tremendous inroads, having come up everywhere sal was clear felled. It now chokes the forest and natural regeneration and threatens a number of the weaker plant species. Lantana is frequent all over the Ranchi plateau.

over the Ranchi plateau.

At Harhap Loranthus was mentioned as rare in 1930 but now seems to have increased in incidence.

Harhap has a total area of 1282 acres (512 hectares), of which sal occupies 851.6 acres (340.6 hectares), miscellaneous 297.6 acres (119 hectares), and rocky blanks 132.8 acres (53 hectares). The main miscellaneous species are: Terminalia tomentosa, Gardenia sp., Zizyphus xylopyra, Embellica officinalis, Anogeissus latifolia, Diospyros melanoxylon, Schleichera trijuga, scattered specimens of Boswellia serrata, and Lagostroemia indica are also found, but there is no Aca-cia catechu.

Systematic working started in 1915 and continues till today. The system is coppice with standards on a 25-year rotation. Harhap is ringed with paddy cultivation in the villages around the periphery.

Period of Work. Harhap has been visited in all seasons in 1951, 1952, 1953, 1954 and 1960. (Prolonged stays extending over two weeks at a time were made.) Again the place was visited frequently in 1962, 1963, 1965, 1966 and 1968.

At one time Harhap abounded in tigers, sambar, spotted deer and wild pig, but the poachers by their predatory activities have wiped out the tiger and reduced the others to negligible numbers. Game birds too have disappeared.

The Army, who goes for shooting practices inside the forest, must be stopped forthwith. They are creating havoc towards wildlife of Harhap. A few years back the casual visitors to Harhap, used to make the acquaintance of a few hoof prints at watering places, that too, is no more. But it is not too late yet. If the Forest Department could convert it into a small sanctuary and try to import some animals and ground birds from other areas, the situation can still be remedied. The cheetal and kalij, which should be made so bold that tourists can see them on short trips from Ranchi.

Birds

Ardeola grayii. Pond Heron. Common
Plalulcus ibis. Cattle Egret. Common
Egretta garzetta. Little Egret
Nycticorax nycticorax. Night Heron. Common
Ciconia episcopus. Whiteheaded Stork
Halius nigrans. Pariah Kite
Accipiter ladius. Chikra
Accipiter nisus. Sparrow-Hawk. Winter visitor
Cyps indicus. Indian Longbilled Vulture
Cyps benghalensis. Indian Whitebacked Vulture
Neophron percnopterus. Scavenger Vulture
Sp. Lornis cheela. Crested Serpent Eagle
Falco chieguera. Redheaded Merlin
Francolinus pondicerianus. Grey Partridge
Vaneilus indicus. Redwattled Lapwing

- Vanellus malabaricus. Yellow-wattled Lapwing
Charadrius dubius. Little Ringed Plover. Seen in winter
Tringa hypoleucos. Common Sandpiper. Winter
Treron phoenicoptera. Green Pigeon. Common
Columba livia. Blue Rock Pigeon
Streptopelia decaocto. Indian Ring Dove. Common.
Streptopelia tranquebarica. Red Turtle Dove
Streptopelia chinensis. Spotted Dove. Very common.
Streptopelia senegalensis. Little Brown Dove
Psittacula krameri. Roseringed Parakeet
Psittacula cyanocephala. Blossomheaded Parakeet
Clamator jacobinus. Pied Crested Cuckoo. Seen on 8.viii.1953
Cuculus varius. Common Hawk-Cuckoo
Cuculus micropterus. Indian Cuckoo. Calling Koi-dekho to.
 This call heard in N. Bihar but not
 Singbhum where the call is Utho-dekho
 or Orange pekoe.
Cuculus canorus. The Cuckoo. On 8.viii.1953; supposed to
 breed in Chota Nagpur
Eudynamis scolopacea. Koel. Only one male seen at Horhap
 in 1962
Centropus sinensis. Coucal. Quite common.
Bubo bubo. Great Horned Owl. Call bu-bo or hu-ho
Athene brama. Spotted Owlet. Common
Strix ocellata. Mottled Wood Owl. Rare.
Caprimulgus indicus. Indian Jungle Nightjar
Caprimulgus macrurus. Longtailed Nightjar
Caprimulgus asiaticus. Common Indian Nightjar
Caprimulgus affinis. Franklin's Nightjar
Apus affinis. House Swift. Near T.B. Sanatorium
Ceryle lucubris. Pied Kingfisher
Alcedo atthis. Common Kingfisher
Halcyon smyrnensis. Whitebreasted Kingfisher. Near paddy fields
Merops orientalis. ~~Green~~ Bee-eater
Merops leschenaulti. Chestnut-headed Bee-eater. Winter
Coracias benghalensis. Indian Roller
Upupa epops. Hoopoe. Frequent
Megalaima haemacephala. Crimsonbreasted Barbet. Common
Pinopium benghalense. Goldenbacked Woodpecker.
Dendrocopos macei. Fulvousbreasted Pied Woodpecker. Two seen
 10.xi.1960; were very shy
Dendrocopos nanus. Pigmy Woodpecker
Eremopterix grisea. Ashycrowned Finch-Lark
Hirundo rustica. Swallow. Winter
Hirundo daurica. Striated Swallow. Winter
Lanius excubitor. Grey Shrike. Mostly winter
Lanius vittatus. Baybacked Shrike. Mimicing shama
Lanius schach. Rufousbacked Shrike
Lanius schach tricolor. Blackheaded Shrike
Oriolus oriolus. Golden Oriole. Winter

- Oriolus chinensis. Blacknaped Oriole. Winter
Oriolus xanthornus. Blackheaded Oriole
Dicrurus adsimilis. Black Drongo
Dicrurus caerulescens. Whitebellied Drongo
Sturnus malabaricus. Greyheaded Myna. Common; numbers increase when simul and pallas bloom
Sturnus pagodarum. Blackheaded Myna.
Sturnus contra. Pied Myna. A few.
Acridotheres tristis. Common Myna. Not many
Dendrocitta vagabunda. Indian Tree Pie. A nest with two young on 7.viii.1953
Corvus splendens. House Crow. A few.
Corvus macrorhynchos. Jungle Crow. Common
Tephrodornis pondicerianus. Common Wood-Shrike
Coracia melanoptera. Blackheaded Cuckoo-Shrike
Pericrocotus flammeus. Scarlet Minivet
Pericrocotus cinnamomeus. Small Minivet
Aegithina tiphia. Common Iora
Chloropsis cochinchinensis. Goldmantled Chloropsis. Frequent
Pycnonotus jocosus. Redwhiskered Bulbul
Pycnonotus cafer. Redvented Bulbul
Dumetia hypervythra. Rufousbellied Babbler
Chrysomma sinensis. Yellow-eyed Babbler. Fairly common; rather partial to lantana berries
Turdoides striatus. Jungle Babbler. Common
Muscicapa parva. Redbreasted Flycatcher. Common winter visitor
Muscicapa tickelliae. Tickell's Blue Flycatcher. Winter
Monarcha azurea. Blacknaped Flycatcher
Orthotomus sutorius. Tailor Bird. Numerous
Sylvia hortensis. Orphean Warbler. Winter
Phylloscopus trochiloides. Dull Green Leaf Warbler. Common in winter
Copsychus saularis. Magpie Robin
Copsychus malabaricus. Shama
Phoenicurus ochruros. Black Redstart
Saxicola caprata. Pied Bush Chat. In open country near T.B. Sanatorium
Saxicoloides fulicata. Indian Robin
Monticola solitarius. Blue Rock Thrush
Zoothera citrina. Orangeheaded Ground Thrush. Always near water
Parus major. Grey Tit. Absent from Horhap, though reported from a place 20 miles (32 km) north of Horhap.
Parus xanthogenys. Blackspotted Yellow Tit. Very common in Ranchi, 9 miles (14.4 km) west of Horhap but absent from Horhap
Sitta castanea. Chestnutbellied Nuthatch. Only seen twice.
Anthus hodgsoni. Hodgson's Tree Pipit. Winter
Anthus novaeseelandiae. Paddyfield Pipit
Motacilla alba. Grey Tit. Winter
Motacilla alba dukhunensis. Pied, or White Wagtail. Winter

10
Motacilla alba leucopsis. Whitefaced Wagtail. Winter
Dicaeum erythrorhynchos. Tickell's Flowerpecker. Common
Nectarinia asiatica. Purple Sunbird
Zosterops palpebrosa. White-eye. Very common. Seen mating
 twice on 10.vi.1955. Pair silent
 while mating.
Passer domesticus. House Sparrow. A few
Petronia xanthocollis. Yellowthroated Sparrow

INDO-GERMAN BIRD SANCTUARY

R. S. Dharmakumarsinhji

Every year when the monsoon rain arrives and makes the dry arid semi-desert land of the Bhal flat lands into luxuriant grassland and wet marshland, the White Storks (Ciconia ciconia) come in the months of August and September.

At one time the Bhal grasslands were extensive and were a haven for birds breeding during the wet period of the monsoon. This September during the third week, I visited the Velavadar-Mithabpur grassland, the former a Blackbuck-Bustard sanctuary, and saw hundred of White Storks scattered over the grassland which was well protected by the Forest Department and the grass lush and dense. My estimate of the White Stork population was about a thousand birds over a fairly wide area of about 10,000 acres. The storks seemed to be feeding on live food not exactly known. The birds although locally trapped were not really scared, but the local Lesser Floricans which I had seen early in the season had vanished. The White Stork is West Germany's National Bird and this grassland in the Bhal is obviously the wintering grounds of the bird, although the birds are on passage and disappear with the rood about November and December and visit the areas close to the Nalsarowar Sanctuary north west of the area. Hence the storks may be considered autumn migrants in the Bhal. If ringing of birds can be organised it would be an ideal Bird Ringing Station and records of Ringed Birds may be more easily available from abroad owing to their larger size. Whether these birds are really coming from Germany or somewhere else could be ascertained. I hope Dr Salim Ali may consider moving in that matter in his usual energetic manner.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

The Monthly Review, January 1971, the official journal of the United Kingdom Citizens' Association carries an interesting column-headed the 'Birdwatchers Forum'. We are glad to see that the Bombay Natural History Society and the Birdwatchers Newsletter are prominently mentioned:

'My response to the Birdwatchers' Forum in October and November numbers of The Monthly Review has been delayed due to preoccupation with articles for the Bombay Natural History Society, which was mentioned last month. I can really recommend the Bombay NHS to anyone interested in wild life. Its address is Hornbill House, Shahid Bhagat Singh Road, Bombay 1 ER. It publishes a Journal three times a year with serious articles on all aspects of natural history including birds and also a monthly Newsletter for Birdwatchers in a more informal tone which I am sure readers of this page would find very useful. It would enable them to find out what other birdwatchers, not just UKCA members, were doing and seeing.'

We see that this note has been written by Mr F. M. Gauntlett who contributed many interesting articles from Durgapur.

*

*

*

One of the most informative and interesting bulletins is Habitat published each month by the Council for Nature, Zoological Gardens, Regent's Park, London, NW 1 4 RY.

The annual subscription for individuals is £1. We quote two paragraphs from Vol. 7(7), July 1971.

'News From BTO. The British Trust for Ornithology's newsletter recently stated that British ringed birds had been reported from most parts of the world, both old and new. Common and Arctic Terns and a Manx Shearwater had been recovered in Australia, dozens of Manx Shearwaters and an Arctic and Great Skua in South America, while an Arctic Tern was recovered after colliding with a whaler off the Antarctic pack-ice. The first recovery of the Indian sub-continent has just been reported - a Tufted Duck, ringed at the Wildfowl Trust ringing station at Abberton in Essex on 28 May 1969, was shot on 14 April this year on the river Sohan, southwest of Rawalpindi in West Pakistan. The recovery was reported through Christopher Savage whose work on the Wildfowl Survey of this area of Asia has been so useful to the International Wildfowl Research Bureau.'

'Marbled Teal Released in Lal Suhanra. World Wildlife Fund announced recently that six pairs of Marbled Teal bred in Britain have been released in the Lal Suhanra Reserve in West Pakistan as part of the effort to restock the area with its depleted wildlife. The Marbled Teal was once common in the area, but had virtually vanished because of excessive hunting. WWF also aided the shipment to Lal Suhanra of Blackbuck Antelopes bred in Texas from Indian stock. Like the Marbled Teal, the Blackbuck was once common in the area but had completely disappeared. It is hoped that Lal Suhanra will be a reserve of some stature within five to ten years.'

*

*

*

Memberships of the Bombay Natural History Society and the
Birdwatchers' Field Club of India

The Editor is grateful to the several readers who have taken the trouble to write in about the alleged conflict between the Bombay Natural History Society and the Field Club. From the dozen or so replies that have come in it is obvious that no such conflict exists. But to come to a proper conclusion we must await further replies.

CORRESPONDENCE

Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) in Poona

On 26th September in the evening in an inundated field behind Agakhan Palace, Yerawada, Poona 14, I saw a snipe-like wader, but with a short black bill, bright pink-orange feet, mottled greenish brown plumage on the back and white underparts and a conspicuous black band on the breast. I suspected it to be Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*). I hurriedly took a snapshot from a distance of about 30 ft with telephoto lens. On being alarmed it flew away and I saw the characteristic pattern on its wings with conspicuous white bars. On referring to the Field Guide I found that my identification was correct. But the Guide as well as Dr Salim Ali in his Birds of Kerala refer it as a shore bird. May I know whether it is also found inland during the migratory season, (I saw it in Poona for the first time.) whether it is common during winter in W. Maharashtra and from which place it is recently reported.

Prakash Gole
Sudarshan Rubber Works
184, Shanwar Peth, Poona

✓From the description given and the photograph enclosed, the identification is correct. The bird occasionally straggles inland. - Ed.✓

Zafar Futehally
Editor,
Newsletter for Birdwatchers
32-A, Juhu Lane, Andheri, Bombay 58-AS

Cover design by R. A. S. Melliush from a photograph by
Peter F. R. Jackson

EDITORIAL BOARD :

Dr. Salim Ali,
Bombay.

Mrs. Jamal Ara,
Ranchi.

Dr. Biswamoy Biswas,
Calcutta.

Kunvar Shri Lavkumar,
Rajkot.

Prof. K. K. Neelakantan,
Trivandrum.

Mr. B. R. Grubh,
Bombay.

Mr. R. L. Fleming, Junior,
Kathmandu, Nepal.

Mr. D. A. Stairmand,
Bombay.

Br. A. Navarro,
Bombay.

Editor :

Mr. Zafar Futchally,
32A, Juhu Lane, Andheri,
Bombay-58 AS.

Annual Subscription Rs. 10/-.

Students Rs. 5/-.